“Discussion is the Laboratory”: A Cross-Comparative Analysis of Four Secondary ELA Teachers’ Discussion-Leading Practices

by

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DEDICATION

To all of my former students, whose brilliance and wit
taught me the importance of listening

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ABSTRACT

Thinkers ranging from John Dewey to Mikhail Bakhtin have theorized the importance of discussion to deep understanding, providing a rich foundation for the growing body of empirical support for the claim that English Language Arts students who participate in discussions learn more than students who do not have this opportunity. Despite abundant theoretical and empirical support for discussion, discussions are rare in American classrooms. Though there are surely other reasons why discussions are so rare in practice, this study takes its cue from the belief that discussion's high degree of difficulty combined with a lack of sufficiently integrated and multi-dimensional professional knowledge for leading discussions makes it a particularly challenging practice to teach and to enact.

This study investigates and compares the discussion-leading practices of four 10th grade ELA teachers. I spent 3-4 weeks in each teacher's classroom, collecting observational data. I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and students and stimulated recall interviews with teachers. I used constant comparative analysis (Strauss, 1987) to identify patterns across the four teachers.

I found that leading discussions rests on the sustained enactment of broadly dialogic teaching practices that advance and are founded upon respectful relationships with students. Though the teachers differed in the specific practices they enacted, they were united by an orientation towards students that was deeply affirming of students' intelligence and personhood, and an underlying ambition to share authority with students.

Together, the teachers' practices formed a pedagogically coherent tapestry that supported students' capacities for text-based discussion.

I also found that sometimes the teachers acted in ways that appeared monologic—and, thus, at odds with their orientations—but that a closer look revealed to be in keeping with their dialogic goals. Indeed, the teachers' practices challenge the common notion that good discussions involve little to no teacher talk. To the contrary, I argue that not all teacher talk is monologic, particularly when that talking is responsive to the larger instructional context.

The findings of this study suggest that the work of leading good discussions is inseparable from the work of establishing a classroom culture in which students feel respected as people and as thinkers and are positioned as meaning-makers. Additionally, the findings suggest that the monologic-dialogic binary does not sufficiently account for all of the pedagogically warranted variations on discussion that, if the teachers in this study are any indication, exist between the two poles. This has implications for teacher education and professional development efforts, and teacher assessment.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Great Ms. Z. Pulls a Discussion Out of Her Hat

Good teaching should not seem like magic, at least not to other teachers, and certainly not to veteran teachers. This holds true in most occupations. While mysterious to the uninitiated, skillful plumbing or heart surgery should appear to plumbers and heart surgeons as the orderly application of known principles and skills, i.e., not the stuff of David Copperfield. Even magic itself—if we are to define magic as feats that defy what we know about how the world works—is not magic to fellow practitioners of magic; it's skillfully orchestrated illusion, the basic principles of which are understood by birthday party magicians.

To say that good teaching is like magic is to attribute the expert teacher's skill to something inexplicable and unknowable. Yet these kinds of assessments of expert teaching are commonplace: "I don't know how she does it, but the kids really listen to her." It is perhaps not surprising that teaching should differ from heart surgery and plumbing (and even magic) in this respect. Teaching is inherently interactional, which is to say that it is not work done *on* some inanimate recipient (like an anesthetized patient or a blocked drain) but work done *with* another human being. In the case of the contemporary American schoolteacher, it is work done with 20-35 human beings, each of whom represents a unique and evolving set of teaching challenges. Then there is the interaction with the content being taught—teacher and students interact with one another while simultaneously interacting with content. This does not make teaching more

technically complex than surgery or plumbing per se, but it does begin to explain why, from a practical standpoint, teaching has been so hard to analyze. A teacher's actions are inextricable from the dizzying array of variables that in any given instance of teaching demand the teacher's attention—variables that interact with each other, sometimes resulting in conflicting demands. This complex web of interaction is the smoke that conceals the magician's hand.

But if we really don't know how expert teachers do what they do, how will we ever teach novice teachers to teach as the expert teacher teaches? Good teaching may *seem like* magic, but when it comes to the work of training teachers, it cannot, at the end of the day, *be* magic. This is serious business; teachers are increasingly viewed as the single most important school-based predictor of student achievement. If our nation is to get any traction on the problem of too many students being left behind, the magician's tricks must be revealed.

The particular trick that this dissertation takes as its focus is leading a discussion in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. I begin by foregrounding the inscrutability of teaching because I have come to believe that discussion is a practice that, when executed successfully, is particularly given to attributions of magic. How many teachers have marveled that a discussion could go so well one period and fall flat on its face the next? This experience is certainly not exclusive to discussion, but I suspect that its likelihood increases in direct proportion to the amount of interaction called for by a practice. Interaction begets variables, variables beget complexity, and complexity begets inscrutability. By this I mean to suggest that discussion's *especially* interactional nature makes it *especially* subject to inscrutability.

Two years ago, I might not have been so insistent on this point. Sure, leading a good discussion is hard. But as a veteran English teacher of fifteen years who prided himself on his ability to lead moderately successful discussions, I considered myself eminently capable of identifying why a particular discussion—led by me or otherwise—went well or didn't go well. If there was the illusion of magic, I was, I thought, in on the trick. Yet upon watching a remarkable video of a local 6th grade teacher leading a rigorous, whole-class discussion of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, there I was, resorting to the dumbstruck words of a magic show spectator: "How'd she *do* that?" She might as well have summoned a rabbit from a hat.

What the students were saying—and how many of them were saying it—fit my expectations for an excellent discussion, but what the teacher—let's call her Ms. Z.—was doing didn't fit into any of my preconceived notions about leading discussions, in particular what a teacher would need to do to lead such a good discussion. Most bewildering was what I perceived to be her passiveness. The students were enthusiastically trading claims about whether the various families in the novel could be defined as "dysfunctional"; meanwhile, Ms. Z. mostly stayed on the periphery. If she had opinions on the topic at hand, she didn't share them. Nor did she assert herself as a facilitator or provide feedback on students' responses. Her face communicated that she was listening and that was all. Was she happy about what students were saying? I didn't know! And I don't think the students did either. For the first twenty minutes, I kept thinking, "Why isn't she cutting in here? Shouldn't she be calling on the quiet students? Maybe she doesn't have anything to contribute?" I was like a teenager hearing music

outside of my comfort zone for the first time. I thought, "What is this?" And, like a teenager, my first reaction was to dismiss it as just plain bad.

It was not until Ms. Z. did weigh in later in the discussion that I realized my reading of passiveness was troublingly off the mark. At a moment when it seemed as if the students had reached a natural terminus, she broke in, and, with a couple of targeted remarks capped off with a question, she somehow managed to add a new layer of sophistication to the conversation without wresting interpretive authority from the students. If she had this kind of power, why wasn't she using it all the time? *Was she being passive on purpose? Was "passive" even the right word? Did I need to go back and watch the video again?* The second viewing confirmed my revised interpretation: what appeared to be passiveness was, in fact, a study in carefully intentioned restraint. She was so good she fooled me. Which prompted a whole other set of questions: Pedagogically, what was gained and lost by withholding? What guided Ms. Z.'s decisions about when to stay silent and when to break in? When she did break in, how did she ensure that she didn't erode the good work that her silence did? What was the right balance between students' voices and the teacher's voice, and what factors affected this balance? And then of course there was the real elephant in the room. Discussions like this don't just appear out of thin air. What prior work did Ms. Z. do with the class to prepare them to more or less independently have such a high-quality discussion?

Perhaps surprisingly, teacher preparation programs (traditional or otherwise) do not have a history of attending to discussion at this level of specificity. If novice teachers enter the classroom with any ideas at all about how to lead discussions, those ideas are more likely to be in the vein of rough principles like "ask open-ended questions" or "get

as many students to speak as possible." Though there are signs that this is changing, it is still common for programs to make broad gestures towards discussion (as in, "discussions are important") without really helping teacher candidates to get inside the practice. By "helping to get inside," I mean providing not only a basic definition of what constitutes a "good" discussion, but an elaboration of the skills and knowledge that expert teachers call on when leading good discussions.[1] The problem is, the complex nature of discussion makes this a heady task. What a good discussion looks like—and what the teacher does during that discussion—might look very different depending on a host of interconnected contextual variables, including the teacher's instructional purpose, the content, and the specific students in the room. All teaching is contingent, but leading discussions—a practice predicated on students talking together about content—is especially so. Moreover, the practice of leading discussions encompasses dozens of other practices, ranging from setting norms to asking questions to managing the "sociocultural ecology" of the classroom (Erickson, 1996). Each of these practices is complex in their own right. Put them all together and you've got a multi-layered, interactional practice that resists the kind of straightforward prescription (i.e., "Do this…") that novice or struggling practitioners often (and understandably) crave.

Complicating matters further is the fact that so much of what teachers do when leading discussions is invisible. There is a deeply cognitive nature to leading discussions, and unfortunately, we cannot see inside the brains of teachers like Ms. Z. This might be said about most aspects of teaching; however, the contingent—and, thus, infinitely variable—nature of leading discussions makes Ms. Z.'s real time decision-making of

[1] And better still if teacher candidates are given opportunities to practice *doing* these things.

[2] To be clear, there is a difference between the teacher who always avoids discussions about sensitive subject

special interest. This cognitive element to leading discussions makes it a really hard practice to study, especially when those decisions are just as likely to manifest in a non-action (see Ms. Z.'s calculated silence) as they are in a more easily observable—and, thus, analyzable—action. The other sense in which the work of leading a discussion is invisible to the outside observer is the sense in which a good discussion is rarely free-standing; that is, a good discussion stands on the backs of all of the discussions that came before. When Student X speaks, the outside observer does not know that Student X did not speak aloud in class until mid-November and only then after much encouragement from Ms. Z. Nor does the outside observer see the work that Ms. Z. did to create a classroom culture that was safe enough for Student X to risk a contribution. When so much of the work is invisible, it makes sense that such a practice—when done well as in Ms. Z.'s case—would seem like magic. It is the desire to know how Ms. Z. did it—to reveal the magician's tricks—that propels this study.

The Problem Space

So far I've only summarized half of the problem—that of discussion's inscrutability. In this section, I attempt to give a more comprehensive account of the problem space that gives this study its urgency. To do this, I begin with two understandings about discussion that are well-documented and that, taken together, suggest that something is amiss. On the one hand, discussion's virtues as an instructional technique have robust empirical and theoretical support. On the other hand, not a lot of teachers actually use discussion.

I'll start with the support, of which there is a great deal. Empirical evidence that discussion is correlated with learning across the disciplines continues to mount. The

educational benefits attributed to discussion in this growing body of work are wide-ranging. One such benefit is student engagement. A number of studies have found that discussion fosters deeper engagement with academic content (e.g., Chapin & O'Connor, 2004; Cobb, Boufi, McClain, & Whitenack, 1997; Michaels, 2005; O'Connor, 1999; Resnick & Nelson-Le Gall, 1997.) When students are permitted to vocalize their ideas, they care more. Another benefit of discussion is the development of communication skills. Students who have the opportunity to participate in discussions demonstrate improvement in their ability to communicate complex ideas and listen to others (Gall & Gillett, 1980; Hadjioannou, 2007; Walshaw & Anthony, 2008; Fogo, 2014). Relatedly, there is a subset of research that draws a line from discussion to students' capacities for participating in a deliberative democracy (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Avery, 2002; Fisher, 1996; Hahn, 1998; Parker & Hess, 2001).

The lion's share of empirical work on the outcomes of discussion focuses on how discussion supports student learning (e.g., Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Kelly, 2008; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Langer, 2001; Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Wells, 2007; Wells & Arauz, 2006). In these studies, "discussion" is typically measured by some quantitative measure like percentage of authentic questions (questions without a prespecified answer) or percentage of open discussion (thirty seconds or more of free exchange of information amongst students) while "learning" is typically measured by students' performance on a standardized exam or some more targeted survey of understanding created by the study's authors. In particular, a number of studies report a positive relationship between discussion and students' performance on reading comprehension tests (e.g., Brown, Pressley, Van Meter,

& Schuder, 1996; Kucan, & Beck, 1997; Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009; Wolf, Crosson, & Resnick, 2005). Importantly, studies show discussion to be an effective practice in a range of contexts and for a range of learners. For example, the above-described benefits of discussion have been found to extend to English Language Learners (Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Resnick, Michaels, & O'Connor, 2010; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Van der Branden, 2000), low-performing students (Langer, 2001; Lee, 2001), and other marginalized student populations (Lee, 1995; Losey, 1995; Okolo, Ferretti, & MacArthur, 2007).

Given the level of enthusiasm for discussion in the literature, one might assume that discussions are common in American classrooms. In fact, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that, in actual K-12 teaching practice, discussions don't happen very often (e.g., Burns & Myhill, 2004; Cazden, 2001; Goodlad, 1970; Myhill, 2006; Myhill and Fisher, 2005; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, Prendergast, 1997). Even when some teachers believe they are making space for student talk, they are often doing something more adequately described as Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Elizabeth, Ross, Anderson, Snow, & Selman, 2012; Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Whereas discussion demands that students speak *to each other*, IRE is a form of classroom discourse comprised of back and forth interactions between individual students and the teacher—in other words, students speaking first and foremost *to the teacher* (Cazden, 1988). While discussions are unusual in all classroom contexts, they are especially rare in lower track classrooms (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002; Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & LePore, 1995; Nystrand et al., 1997; Oakes, 1985;

Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992). In sum, what I saw happen in Ms. Z.'s class just isn't very common in American classrooms.

All of this prompts the obvious question: If discussion is as central to student learning across the K-12 curriculum as the above-cited studies suggest, then why aren't more teachers doing it? In this chapter, I highlight the complexity of leading discussions and the related lack of clear and specific guidance for how to do this very difficult work skillfully. To be sure, much progress has been made in the last thirty years on what good discussions look like and what one might do to lead one. However, and I will attend to this more thoroughly in Chapter 2, much of that guidance suffers from being piecemeal—i.e., a little bit of this, a little bit of that, without much attention to how the "this" and the "that" go together —and/or divorced from the complexities of real practice, and, thus, is, a times, a little one-dimensional or flat on the page. This puts the onus on teacher preparation programs to integrate all of that knowledge—much of which is still underresearched—and to represent it in a way that adequately accounts for its multitudes. The lack of discussion in American classrooms suggests some failure of transmission in this regard. Though there are surely other important reasons why discussions are so rare in practice, this study takes its cue from the belief that discussion's high degree of difficulty combined with a lack of sufficiently integrated and multi-dimensional professional knowledge for leading discussions makes it a particularly challenging practice to teach and to enact.

A Hypothetical Discussion on Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*

Now that I've provided a brief summary of the landscape, I want to give more specificity to the claim that I've asserted throughout about discussion's inherent

complexity. To do this, it might help to situate that complexity within the context of a specific discussion. With this goal in mind, I present here a preliminary conceptualization of the specific kinds of expertise an ELA teacher might need in order to lead a generative discussion on the opening paragraph of Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845). I focus on Douglass' narrative because it is a text that I'm familiar with and have great admiration for, but also because it is so commonly taught in American secondary classrooms. To flesh out this hypothetical, I draw on my experiences teaching the *Narrative* at the New England Literature Program and collaboratively developing a performance assessment around it as part of my research assistantship at TeachingWorks (a teacher education hub based at the University of Michigan). In this passage, Douglass writes about how his master denied him knowledge of his own birthday, establishing what is arguably the book's central theme—the relationship between knowledge and power. There is much more to say about this passage, but this simple description should suffice in order to consider it as the topic of a hypothetical discussion. To organize this conceptualization, I break it down into three type of expertise that might be needed to lead a good discussion on the *Narrative*: subject matter expertise, pedagogical expertise, and learner expertise. Finally, I imagine what it looks like to enact all three kinds of expertise together.

Subject matter expertise

I begin with subject matter expertise because before teachers begin the discussion with students, before they even begin planning for the discussion, they must first encounter the *Narrative* on their own. It is certainly not radical to suggest that teachers should know the material that they're teaching. In the case of the Douglass text, "the

material" counts as both the meaning of the text and the skills employed by the reader to make that meaning. In order to understand the text, our hypothetical teacher must first ask the right questions of it. Questions such as: Why does Douglass begin with this bit about not knowing his birthday? Why doesn't he begin with something more sensational, something to immediately impact the reader with the horrors of slavery? And why is his tone so restrained, so matter-of-fact, as if he were recounting a simple trip to the store and not the painful details of growing up as a slave? These questions can be categorized more broadly as the kinds of questions that should be asked of any work of non-fiction: questions about purpose, tone, and audience. Although expert readers might ask these questions out of instinct, a teacher of reading must make explicit what those expert readers do instinctively. It is not quite enough for the teacher to arrive at some important revelation about why Douglass begins the *Narrative* as he does; the teacher must be able to articulate how he/she got there. State licensure examinations of content knowledge typically do not assess for the latter; they test prospective ELA teachers' ability to comprehend a text but stop short of testing their ability to unpack that comprehension. If one way to understand a text-based discussion is as a scaffolded interrogation of a text—a public and collaborative version of what expert readers do on their own when they read—then how would a teacher who lacks explicit knowledge of what expert readers do, say, identify the important questions to ask of a text in such a discussion?

With regards to the teacher's own understanding of the *Narrative*, it is probably not acceptable for a teacher to read the opening paragraph and to miss that Douglass is writing about knowledge and power. This is not to say that the subsequent discussion is doomed; it is, after all, a discussion, which means students may catch what the teacher

overlooked. But missing such a crucial point does not bode well for the teacher's ability to get students there in the case that they need support. Ball, Thames, and Phelps (2008) write that teachers "must recognize when their students give wrong answers." In ELA discussions, the mantra "there are no wrong answers" is often invoked to encourage student participation. This is well-meaning, but ultimately misleading. There *are* wrong interpretations of a text. There are also simplistic or unsophisticated interpretations of a text. A teacher should be able to recognize both, and if other students don't step in to challenge and/or complicate their peers' analysis during the discussion, the responsibility falls on the teacher to find a way to do so.

Also important to interpreting this particular text is knowledge of the historical context in which Douglass was writing (antebellum America) and the primary audience to whom he was writing (a white readership that needed to be convinced slavery should be abolished). Relatedly, some knowledge of rhetorical strategy is likely going to be needed here. Of course, none of this prerequisite knowledge is unique to leading discussions. In fact, some might argue that leading a discussion requires *less* content knowledge; discussions, after all, foreground student ideas whereas something more teacher-centered, like a lecture, foregrounds the depth and richness of the teacher's ideas. A counterargument to this logic is that it is precisely because discussions foreground student ideas—and therefore are unscripted and have the potential to cover terrain unconsidered by the teacher in his/her planning—that teachers of discussion-based lessons must be particularly well-versed in the content. This would also suggest that a teacher's ability to refrain from feeding his/her rich content knowledge to students is an

important component of leading discussions—a notion that, to some, might seem antithetical to teaching.

Pedagogical expertise

In addition to knowledge about the text itself, a teacher must also have "pedagogical expertise," by which I mean to include everything that a teacher must know how to do, from planning to execution, in order to lead a good discussion. I also include what I'm going to refer to here as "pedagogical orientation." Underpinning a teacher's ability to lead a discussion is his/her orientation toward students, toward the content, and toward the enterprise of teaching itself. My suspicion is that some orientations are better fitted to leading discussions than others. An example of an orientation that is probably not conducive to leading discussions is the teacher who does not believe that his/her students have anything particularly valuable to say. Hopefully it is a rare teacher who would so openly express such disrespect for student thinking, but even when this orientation is masked or subconscious, it is often belied by the way in which a teacher responds to students. Does the teacher take student ideas seriously? Does he/she really listen? Does he/she probe a confusing or unclear response rather than assuming it's nonsensical and moving on?

Another example of an orientation that is less conducive to leading discussions is the teacher who believes it is the teacher's job to be the sole expert in the room. This view may stem from traditional notions of teacher-student roles, reinforced by years as a student in classrooms in which it is the student's job to listen to the teacher, or it may stem from a perceived need to establish intellectual authority over one's students. Either way, this orientation is likely to result in less space for students to demonstrate their own

expertise. Teachers may also have rigid notions about what is worth discussing. Why have students discuss Douglass' intentions in the opening paragraph when a quick Internet search would no doubt bring them to many, if not all, of the same conclusions? If the information is already out there, why have students engage in the artificial exercise of generating it themselves? This represents an orientation toward both learning and time use. Teachers, as we all know, are increasingly under a time crunch to cover a certain amount of material. A teacher under this pressure may be less inclined to provide the time and space necessary for a good discussion to unfold.

A final example—and one that is particularly relevant to our hypothetical discussion on Douglass' *Narrative*—is the teacher who is afraid to have students discuss sensitive subject matter. What if a white student says something to offend black students, or vice versa? The conflict-averse teacher may be inclined to curtail discussion that enters into potentially inflammatory or contested territory.[2] Relatedly, some teachers may avoid discussion simply because they are afraid of giving up control over students' behaviors. I present these examples as common sense speculations about the relationship between a teacher's pedagogical orientation and his/her approach to and execution of a discussion (not to mention his/her decision to use discussion at all). Without an orientation that is compatible with discussion, it's hard to imagine a teacher taking the kinds of actions necessary to lead one well.

On the other hand, simply having a discussion-friendly orientation is not enough to guarantee that a teacher will lead good discussions. This orientation must be coupled

[2] To be clear, there is a difference between the teacher who always avoids discussions about sensitive subject matter and the teacher who has real reason to believe that a particular group of students is not ready for a particular discussion (or that he/she is not ready to lead a particular discussion).

with skillful teaching—that is, a command of the skills that support generative discussions. This includes the skills called on during the planning and execution of a discussion. By skills, I intend to signify the things that teachers do as opposed to what they know, but, of course, it is nearly impossible to completely separate the two. For example, the skill of generating questions that are rich enough and compelling enough to spark a discussion with a specific group of students requires knowledge of both the content and that group of students, as with the skill of generating a series of questions that build on one another in the service of some common pedagogical goal. Part of the complexity of leading a discussion is the interconnected nature of all the variables that touch upon the work.

Additionally, student-centered practices like discussion accentuate the improvisational nature of teaching. The most carefully planned lesson cannot plan what students are going to say. The exact same discussion in third period may demand a completely different set of skills than it did the period before. Amongst other things, this unpredictability has implications for teacher education. How does one rehearse if there isn't a script? It also makes leading a discussion teaching's high wire act. At any moment, what appears an orderly discussion can plunge into chaos or, perhaps even worse, disinterest.

Learner expertise

The third type of expertise involves what the teacher knows about his/her students. The best teaching is responsive to the specific learners in the room. Even a teacher-centered practice like lecture should be fitted to its audience. Are these fifth graders or twelfth graders? Do they know anything about the topic? How much

information is too much information? Ideally, the answers to these questions inform a teacher's instructional decisions. And as a teacher learns more about his/her students, those decisions can become more targeted. Consider the difference between a set of discussion questions designed for 9th graders in general and another set of questions designed for a particular group of 9th graders. If our hypothetical teacher of the *Narrative* knows that his/her students just completed a unit on U.S. slavery in their history class, then he/she may determine that students have enough background knowledge to jump right into a discussion about the text. Of course, this assumption may prove to be wrong, at which point, the teacher would use this new knowledge to revise his/her earlier decision.

Discussions demand that teachers be constantly inputting student behavior—a comment, an audible sigh of frustration, two students in the back having a side conversation—and making in-the-moment decisions about how to respond (or not to respond) to that behavior. Without knowledge of students, some of these decisions will be random, or even more problematically, based on misunderstandings. Take the quiet student who hasn't spoken yet. Should our teacher cold call on her? Does our teacher have some rapport with this student? Has cold-calling worked before? Does it look like the student is paying attention, like if she were called on, she might have something to contribute? Or would she simply be caught off guard and feel chastised for not paying attention? What is our teacher's purpose here? Is it to get the quiet student to speak, or to establish a precedent? Does this particular group of students require such a precedent? This is just one decision point but it comes with a litany of considerations, all of which call on a teacher's knowledge of his/her students.

"All Together Now"

It is not enough to have expertise in subject matter, pedagogy, or learners. Leading a discussion demands expertise in all three—and the ability to efficiently scan across that expertise, to integrate copious and, at times, contradictory considerations into a single action. Let's look at an example. Imagine that our hypothetical teacher begins the discussion on the *Narrative* by asking students why slaveholders would not have wanted slaves to know their own birthdays, and one student responds, "Maybe they didn't want slaves to get certain privileges like voting."[3] The student's response is clearly based on a misunderstanding—slaves couldn't vote, even if they could prove they were 18. Moreover, the response does not attend to the direct psychological consequences of being deprived of such basic self-knowledge—instead it posits an indirect consequence, not being allowed to vote. Yet implicit in the response is the understanding that slaveholders deprived slaves of this knowledge in order to exert *some kind of power* over them; it just gets the source of that power wrong. This is not so surprising for a 9th grader. Douglass does not come out and say in the opening paragraph that the chains of slavery were physical *and* mental chains. This requires some inferential work on the part of the reader, work that many 9th graders are not yet able to do on their own.

In addition to meeting expectations for general 9th grader-ness, this student—call her Kimberly—is also a specific 9th grader with learning considerations specific to her. Let's imagine Kimberly is a student who is easily discouraged, and when she gets discouraged, she disengages. Let's also imagine that Kimberly can be quite distracting to other students when she is disengaged. Thus, it is crucial that our teacher's response be

[3] This is a real student comment taken from a video that TeachingWorks collected during its tryout of the performance assessment that I reference above.

sufficiently encouraging to keep her on board. But how to do this while attending to her misunderstanding? Should our teacher gently point out that slaves could not vote regardless of age, betting on his/her ability to couch the correction in language that affirms Kimberly's contribution, maybe by praising (and asking the rest of the class to build on) her implicit identification of the power imbalance between slaves and slaveholders? Or would a peer be better positioned to address Kimberly's misunderstanding? This might especially be the case if our teacher and Kimberly have a fraught history. But what if the only student with his hand raised is a notorious know-it-all who would get no doubt get pleasure from correcting a peer? Or someone with whom Kimberly routinely argues? Another option might be to write Kimberly's response on the board and to insist on assembling a collection of responses to the original question before commenting on any single response, in this way putting some distance between Kimberly and her contribution, and, conveniently, buying our teacher a little time. But this means writing something on the board that is, in fact, wrong. Is it okay to do that? And what if recording her mistake on the board makes Kimberly feel even worse?

This single decision point—how best to respond to Kimberly's comment—is an example of what Lampert (1984, 1985, 1986) calls a "practical dilemma"—an instance of teaching in which teachers must manage multiple and sometimes conflicting goals. These goals are often the byproduct of a teacher's knowledge. For example, our teacher is only able to articulate the importance of actively encouraging Kimberly because he/she *knows* what Kimberly is like as a learner. At the same time, his/her subject matter expertise recommends something more delicate than simply praising Kimberly's response and moving on—otherwise Kimberly's misunderstanding might spread.

Meanwhile, his/her pedagogical expertise perceives that the most student-centered move is probably to get students to comment on Kimberly's response. Unfortunately, only one student has his hand raised, and our teacher's learner expertise cautions against calling on that particular student for this purpose. Teachers call on a wide range of skills and knowledge when leading discussions. Inconveniently, this expertise does not always pull in a single direction. What's more, our teacher does not have overnight to weigh options; he/she must act immediately.

Study Overview: Research Questions and Research Design

In this dissertation study, I describe the discussion-related practices of a small sample of veteran secondary ELA teachers. Leading a discussion, as the above description of the hypothetical discussion on Douglass' *Narrative* demonstrates, is not easy work, and the disparateness and narrowness that characterizes much of the professional knowledge around how to do it surely doesn't make it any easier. This is not to say that we, as a profession, know nothing about how to lead ELA discussions. However, there remains much need for further elaboration. And if Ms. Z. is any indication, there are ELA teachers out there who have developed a considerable amount of expertise in leading discussions. This population of teachers represents an untapped reservoir of knowledge for future (and current) teachers. I recall Ms. Z. and marvel at how she made it look so effortless. This study is designed to go behind the curtain, so to speak, to see how teachers like Ms. Z integrate so many important—and, at times, competing—considerations into a coherent and actionable approach to leading discussions.

The research questions guiding my study are:

1. What practices are vital to leading good secondary ELA text-based discussions?
2. What beliefs (about learning, about students, about literature, etc.) support those practices, and, conversely, are revealed by those practices?
3. How, if at all, do the practices function together as a whole (or, as a unified practice of leading discussions)?

To investigate these questions, I spent one month in four secondary ELA teachers' classrooms, observing their teaching and collecting video records. Because I theorized that teachers do a great deal of work that supports discussion outside of the actual discussions, I did not limit my observations to the discussions that the teachers led, but observed everything they did in a single class for a month. I also conducted semi-structured interviews and stimulated recall interviews with the teachers. Finally, I conducted student focus groups with a small sample of students from each teacher's class. I used constant comparative analysis (CCA) to look for patterns across the data.

Overview of Dissertation

In Chapter Two, I provide a brief overview of the theoretical and democratic foundations for dialogic teaching methods like discussion and review empirical studies related to the practice of leading discussions.

In Chapter Three, I present the research design and methodologies. I share details about participant recruitment, interview protocols, and methods of data collection and analysis.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six include the findings of this study. In Chapter Four, I describe the teachers' orientations towards students, which were distinguished by a deep

respect for students' personhood and intelligence. In Chapter 5, I describe the teachers' shared ambition of sharing authority with students. In Chapter 6, I present the teachers' practices—both around and during discussions. These practices formed a pedagogically coherent tapestry that supported students' capacities for text-based discussion.

In Chapter Seven, I present the conclusions of this research. I review the major findings and suggest ways the findings might contribute to the work of preparing secondary ELA teachers. I offer implications to teacher educators and assessment designers.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES

Origins of a Revered But Feared Practice

Interestingly, classroom discussion has long been esteemed by prominent American educators while remaining somewhat uncommon in actual practice. In the following paragraphs, I provide a brief sketch of 19th-century arguments for and against discussion, arguments that I believe remain vital—if somewhat altered—two centuries later.

Horace Mann, an early defender of public education in America and the first Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, does not refer directly to discussion in his arguments for democratic education, but it is hard to imagine a practice better suited to his purposes. Mann believed it was the job of schools to put children from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds in a room together and to cultivate the kind of social harmony he viewed as essential to the nation's stability (Mann, 1957). While it is conceivable that a teacher might explain for students what unites them, it seems likely that Mann had something more experiential in mind. To *experience* commonality across difference, one must speak and listen across that difference. Moreover, if schools were to successfully develop the kind of intelligent citizen that Mann believed the long-term survival of our democracy to ride upon—i.e., a citizen who would not be easily swayed by disingenuous political propaganda—then they would need to employ educational methods conducive to that end. Such an ambition recommends against approaches to education that position children as passive receivers

of knowledge. Discussion is not the only means to a more active education, but it is one way to cast children in the role of thinkers rather than mere "memorizers."

Mann's hopes for public schooling are in stark contrast with accounts of what was actually happening inside schools during Mann's time. In 1845, a visiting committee to Boston's grammar schools had this to say about the instruction they observed:

> It will be noticed that we find in most of our schools, a narrow and merely mechanical instruction. It appeals to the memory quite too exclusively. And if it leaves the text-books at all, it is only so far as is absolutely necessary for the purpose of explaining them. (Annual Report of the Visiting Committee of the Boston Grammar and Writing Schools, 1845, p. 24).

What the committee observed was not peculiar to the Boston schools; historian William Reese avers that mechanical teaching practices like those described by the committee were the norm in Mann's day (Reese, 2005). Some fifty years later, education reformer Joseph Mayer Rice would find very little changed. In a withering critique of New York City schools, he reports, "In no single exercise is a child permitted to think. He is told just what to say, and he is drilled not only in what to say, but also in the manner in which he must say it" (Rice, 1893, p. 38). Here the budding citizen is reduced to a parrot. It would be difficult to invent a pedagogy more diametrically opposed to Mann's vision for schooling than this.

Though these practices were a response to the large class sizes that many teachers faced (Kaestle, 1983), they also reflected the commonly held conviction that a classroom built around student ideas was a deeply inefficient—and, therefore, pedagogically irresponsible—path to learning. Traditionalists, like the schoolmasters of those same

Boston schools, believed that allowing students to follow their own educational inclinations was folly of the highest order. In a written response to Mann's student-centered philosophy, the schoolmasters asked, "…must [the child's] caprice govern [his teachers] and determine them to abandon, even for a time, what they know is all-important in teaching him to read?" (Boston Grammar School Masters' Response to Horace Mann's Seventh Annual Report, 1844, p. 115). In other words, since teachers already know what is important for students to learn, why waste precious class time on students' "caprices"?

And what if those caprices were not merely capricious, but something worse? When 19th-century educators Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody published a record of discussions that they led with children about the gospels, they were publicly vilified for their educational methods. Carlson (1988) tells the story:

> Nathan Hale, editor of [*the Boston Daily Advertiser*, one of Boston's leading dailies] and a deacon of the staid Brattle Street Church, mercilessly damned the book and the school, pointing out that Alcott's aims and methods could only produce "mischievous effects" and "erroneous notions." Appalled by the students' "crude and indigested thoughts" on the New Testament and the impropriety of the discussions of birth, Hale offered some blunt advice: "These conversations appear the first fruits of the new attempt to draw wisdom from babes and sucklings. It is in our opinion, a signal failure, and we cannot recommend any longer perseverance in the experiment." (p. 453)

For Hale, trying to draw wisdom from children was not merely pedagogically inexpedient, but an act of heresy.

The Boston schoolmasters (and contemporaries like Hale) believed that ultimate authority lay with the teacher, and that this authority extended over the minds *and* bodies[4] of his/her students. As discussions risk conferring authority to student ideas—and are vulnerable to the vagaries of those ideas—it is possible to imagine why discussion might not have been a favored instructional strategy of the schoolmasters. It is also possible to imagine how the schoolmasters' dual prioritization of efficiency and teachers' authority might have manifested in the kind of mechanical instruction observed in the schools under their charge. The use of the word "mechanical" stresses the machine-like nature of such instruction; it is designed to transmit knowledge from teacher to student (or textbook to student) with maximum efficiency and the least amount of variation as possible. The particularities of the people in the room—the students and the teacher—are wholly incidental. More collaborative forms of learning, like discussion, are dependent on those particularities, and so are predisposed to precisely the kind of variation that the schoolmasters would have regarded as waste. Mainstream views on teaching and learning have come a long ways since the schoolmasters' day; nonetheless, it seems plausible that a fear of inefficiency is still very much alive in present-day educators' reluctance to use discussion.

In the battle for the hearts and minds of American teachers, it would seem that the case for discussion has consistently been on the losing end. Studies of classroom discourse have produced remarkably similar results over the years.[5] In 1860, Morrison lamented that "young teachers are very apt to confound rapid questioning and answers with sure and effective teaching" (cited in Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969, p. 153). Colvin

[4] See the schoolmasters' defense of corporal punishment.

[5] Much of the following history is taken from Nystrand et al. (1997).

wrote in 1919 that only "about five percent [of the teacher questions he studied] could be considered in any way genuine thought questions" (p. 269). A few years later, Miller (1922) remarked wryly that the teachers he observed seemed incapable of "endur[ing] the silence that must prevail while the pupil is thinking and organizing his material" (quoted in Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969, p. 154). These observations are not remarkably dissimilar from those of Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, and Smith (1966) and Hoetker (1968), who, thirty years later, found that teachers spent about two-thirds of their instructional time talking. Nor would they be out place in turn-of-the-21st century descriptions of classroom discourse like Nystrand et al.'s (1997) who, in a large-scale study of secondary English classrooms, found that discussion, on average, accounted for less than forty seconds of lesson time, and Burns and Myhill's (2004) who describe the teachers they observed as "control[ling] the knowledge in an inflexible authoritative manner" (p. 47). This is just a small sample of studies that take classroom discourse as their focus, but they indicate a general pattern of teacher-centered instruction in American classrooms, and suggest that the legacy of the Boston schoolmasters is still with us.

Sociocultural Roots

In the century following Rice's tour of American classrooms, the theoretical base for discussion would deepen and widen. Much of this work would have a sociocultural bent, a branch of psychology that emphasizes the social influence on an individual's cognitive development. In his classic 1900 text, *The School and Society*, philosopher John Dewey articulates the importance of facilitating student talk that hews closely to its original, social purpose—the deeply human need to share experiences with and learn

from other human beings. This is an instinct, Dewey argues, that all children possess, and that can be channeled productively in school. He contrasts this kind of student talk with the dominant mode of the time—the recitation—described by Rice with such spirited venom above. Recitation has come to mean something slightly different in a contemporary context, but in Dewey's (and Rice's) time, it referred to a tightly scripted, drill-like procedure in which students spoke just long enough to recite what they learned. Dewey describes it as "a place where the child shows off to the teacher and the other children the amount of information he has succeeded in assimilating from the textbook" (pp. 33-34). Such a practice removes speech from its natural purpose—a medium for sharing ideas—and repurposes it as a rigidly executed regurgitation of other people's thoughts.

To emphasize the difference between recitation and the freer kind of discourse that he recommends, Dewey offers an uncharacteristically snappy one-liner: "There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something" (p. 35). In Dewey's ideal school, students would speak not because they were told to, but because they were moved to. He writes: "The recitation becomes the social clearing-house, where experiences and ideas are exchanged and subjected to criticism, where misconceptions are corrected, and new lines of thought and inquiry are set up" (p. 34). Though Dewey does not use the word "discussion" here, what he had in mind was likely quite similar to what is called discussion in today's parlance.

Contemporaneous with Dewey were two thinkers often associated with the origins of the sociocultural tradition: George Herbert Mead and Lev Vygotsky. Frequently cited by contemporary advocates for discussion, their ideas establish a social basis for learning.

For Mead, the self is socially derived in the sense that, as an abstraction, it is composed of thoughts, and thoughts are, in turn, composed of socially derived symbols of language, a natural byproduct of social interaction. Or, working backwards, without social interaction, there would be no need for language; without language, there would be no thoughts, just impulses; and, without thoughts, there would be no self. It is through social interaction—necessitated by some joint human activity, whether it be building a fire or interpreting a poem—that individuals develop their facility with language, and, by extension, their ability to have sophisticated thoughts about the world and their place in it (Mead, 1934).

From an educational perspective, Mead's theory of learning recommends organizing learning around some joint activity designed to elicit interaction. Of course, "interaction" is not synonymous with "discussion." The premise that people learn in the context of some cooperative human enterprise does not stipulate that discussion be the medium of that learning. An apprentice working in near silence with a master is undoubtedly learning. And recitation is no less a form of social interaction than, say, a debate. Where Mead is silent on qualitative distinctions between kinds of interaction, Vygotsky makes a case for more discussion-like talk. Cognitive growth, he argues, "is more likely when one is required to explain, elaborate, or defend one's position to others, as well as to oneself; striving for an explanation often makes a learner integrate and elaborate knowledge in new ways" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 158). This theory—what Vygotsky refers to as "sociogenesis"—provides important pedagogical justification for giving students the space to articulate their own ideas.

In building a theoretical case for discussion's primacy in learning, educational researchers draw on the work of a diverse range of thinkers whose ideas carry on and extend the sociocultural tradition of Mead and Vygotsky. Much of this work—in particular, that which takes up Mead's ideas about the socially constructed nature of the self—has come to be lumped under the category of social constructionism. In his 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, scientist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn takes the position that scientific knowledge (like Mead's self) is a social construction. In order to have communicable meaning, scientific knowledge must be represented linguistically or by some other form of symbolic representation. Since any such representation is the product of a particular community in a particular time, scientific knowledge necessarily bears the indelible birthmark of that community (Bruffee, 1986). One implication of this is that science cannot make claims to a direct line with objective truth—free from the static of linguistic or cultural subjectivity—as its representation is necessarily bound up with subjectively employed and understood symbols, all of which are artifacts of culture(s). Almost two decades after the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, philosopher Richard Rorty would extend Kuhn's ideas to apply to all knowledge, not just scientific knowledge. In his 1979 book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty argues that knowledge only becomes accepted as such once it is "socially justified"—that is, once it meets its respective community's discursive standards for truth. Sounding a similar note as Mead and Kuhn, he argues that "the ways in which we come to describe or otherwise account for the world (including ourselves and our experiences) are derived from historically situated linguistic and symbolic interactions with others" (Alvermann et al., 1996, p. 247).

Another thinker frequently cited by proponents of discussion is the Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin. Although he preceded Kuhn and Rorty by several decades, his work remained relatively unknown until after his death (at least in the West). His primary contribution to social constructionist theories of learning is his notion of monologic versus dialogic discourse. In this dichotomy, Bakhtin (1981) classifies monologic discourse as "authoritative" (or fixed) and dialogic discourse as "internally persuasive" (or negotiable). Whereas in monologic discourse, truth is constructed from a single, dominant perspective—e.g., the teacher's, or the textbook's, or a single student's—in dialogic discourse, truth is constructed from "a multiplicity of perspectives and voices" (Robinson, 2011, para. 14). Bakhtin (1984) writes: "Truth is not born nor is it found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (p. 110). This theory has clear educational applications: is it through dialogic forms of discourse, like discussion, that knowledge is constructed; thus, it is important for teachers to provide students with opportunities to dialogue—with one another, with texts, and with the teacher (e.g., Alexander, 2004; Dyson, 2000; Wells, 2007).

This distillation of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, as rendered above, glosses over a great deal of the complexity of Bakhtin's ideas about language and knowledge. However, it is important to convey this distilled version because it is in this form that Bakhtin's thinking is typically received by educators, particularly when dialogic methods of instruction are pitched as a superior alternative to monologic methods of instruction. It is not too far of a leap from here to begin conceiving of any extended episode of teacher talk as something to be avoided completely. What is lost in this distillation is Bakhtin's

belief that every single sentence ever written or uttered is dialogic, in the sense that every utterance is in conversation with utterances that came before it and utterances that might follow it (Lee, 2001). Bakhtin does not define dialogism as multiple people in conversation; he defines it as a principle that encompasses all human language. At the same time, even if an utterance itself is inescapably dialogic, the speaker's intention (and perceived position in relation to his/her listeners) might be more or less dialogic. In the following quote, Bakhtin elaborates on how an utterance might be deployed monologically (1984):

> Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and responsibilities….Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force….Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. (pp. 292-293)

It follows from this definition of monologism that an extended episode of teacher talk might actually be dialogic if it is aware of the students' response(s) and does not intend to be the ultimate word on the matter. This complicates the blanket characterization of any and all teacher-centered talk as monologic, and, thus, as less preferable than student-centered talk. Or, at least, it complicates using Bakhtin to make that case. It also pushes beyond an exclusive focus on form (e.g., Did the teacher talk more than the students?) to a consideration of the intent of the discourse and the positioning of the speaker. Unsurprisingly, the words "monologic" and "dialogic" come up a lot in this dissertation. For the most part, I am gesturing towards the common usage of those words, but I also move towards a more expansive conceptualization of dialogism that, by my thinking, is truer to Bakhtin's theory.

Social constructionists like Kuhn, Rorty, and Bahktin make broad claims about how human beings come to know what they know and the nature of that knowledge, and, thus, have received considerable attention from educators. If knowledge is established through interactions with others, then it follows that students should be given opportunities to interact with one another. Without discussion or some kind of interchange very much like discussion, students would not be able to build the social consensus—"arrived at for the time being by communities of knowledgeable peers" (Bruffee, 1986, p. 777)—so essential to knowledge creation. Of course, this stance presupposes that students *should* be creators of knowledge, an assumption that is by no means shared by educators everywhere. Following in the tradition of the Boston schoolmasters, there persists a belief—implicit in the social and physical structures of schools[6]—that the teacher's job is one of transmission; in other words, it is not for students to create knowledge but to retain it. The teacher of physics might ask, do my students need to "discover" the laws of motion every year, or can I just tell them what Newton discovered 300 years ago? The latter method certainly saves time, no small thing in this era of high-stakes accountability in which teachers are pressed to cover everything that might be on The Test. The former method, on the other hand, demands that students interact with the world and their peers as scientists do, which is to say they must articulate questions and collectively endeavor to answer those questions with whatever language is available to them—ideally honing that language on the way. The English professor, Kenneth Bruffee, who leans on the social constructionists in his argument for

[6] Desks in rows facing forward is just one example of such a structure.

collaborative learning, writes: "To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively—that is, we must learn to converse well" (Bruffee, 1984, p. 640).

There is something hollow about the proposed dichotomy above. When framed this way—student-centered vs. teacher-centered—it would seem that teachers must choose one or the other: pure lecture or pure discussion. In reality, a classroom governed by either of those extremes would likely be lacking. A class based solely around lecture and recitation would not provide students with the opportunity to develop their ability to speak, which, as the social constructionists argue, is intimately connected to their ability to think. A class based solely around discussion does not acknowledge that in order for a discussion to be any good, it is often necessary for the teacher to employ more teacher-centered techniques to prepare students for the discussion (e.g., if students don't know anything about the conditions of African-Americans in the post-Reconstruction South, how would they ever be able to discuss the respective strengths and weaknesses of Booker T. Washington's and W. E. B. Du Bois' approaches to combatting white supremacy?). It may even be necessary for a teacher to interrupt a discussion to provide important content knowledge. If this is the case, how do teachers do this without stepping on students' authority as thinkers—in other words, without reifying the traditional power structure that positions teachers as the transmitters of knowledge and students as the receivers?

My intention in summarizing some of the theoretical support for discussion is not to make the claim that discussion is unconditionally more effective than teacher-centered techniques like lecture; rather, it is to make the claim that a) discussion *is* a valuable use of instructional time, and b) it is more effective than lecture *with regard to certain*

instructional purposes. A number of scholars have noted that dialogic and monologic methods might be used in tandem to positive educational effect (e.g., Michaels et al., 2008; Wells, 2002; 2007) Indeed, rather than fall prey to the teacher-centered versus student-centered dichotomy, I hope to form a more complete picture of the relationship between discussion and other less student-centered instructional practices. A completely discussion-based class—though exciting to consider in the abstract—is probably not practical nor pedagogically sound given the diversity of instructional purposes and learners that the average American teacher must teach to.

What Makes an ELA Discussion "Good"?

Since what a teacher does to initiate and/or support discussion is ideally in the service of making discussions "good," it will be important to consider what "good" means. With this in mind, I spend the following pages summarizing the literature's conceptualization of "good." However, it is important to note that this conceptualization is a generalized, universal one. In other words, it does not capture the possibility that what a "good" discussion looks like might vary widely depending on some key variables, such as students' familiarity with discussions, the topic/text, the difficulty of the teacher's (or the students') questions, how tired the students are that day, etc. With that said, there are a few basic defining characteristics of "good" discussions that the literature lays out plainly. Although I tried to keep an open mind to what is a good discussion throughout my analysis, I used the literature's explication of what is "good" to ground my thinking and interpreting.

There is, in fact, not a lot of discord in the literature's definition of "good." The place where much of the elaboration of discussion in the literature seems to start is the

difference between recitation and discussion. Scholars belabor this distinction because of the enduring prevalence of recitation in American schools (e.g., see Nystrand et al., 1997, pp. 41-42) and because there is the overriding sense that this has been so at the expense of other forms of discourse like discussion. It likely does not help that it is common for teachers to report having discussions when what they are actually doing is recitation (e.g., Alvermann et al., 1990; Hardman & Williamson, 1998). At its most crude, the difference between recitation and discussion is encapsulated in the pattern of the interaction between the teacher and students. Recitation follows a pattern of teacher-student-teacher-student. Discussion, on the other hand, is distinguished by multiple student contributions between the teacher's contributions and may not include any teacher contributions at all (Applebee et al., 2003). When the teacher does talk during a discussion, his/her comments will tend to be more facilitative than evaluative (Bridges, 1979; Henning, Nielsen, Henning, & Schulz, 2008).

The term "I-R-E," or "Initiation-Response-Evaluation" is often used to describe what happens in a recitation. In classroom discourse that follows the I-R-E pattern, the teacher *initiates* the discussion by asking a question, a student *responds*, and the teacher *evaluates* the student's response before asking the next question (Cazden, 2001). Note that it is the teacher who controls the discourse; the teacher asks the questions and the students answer them as best they can. Though it is not inconceivable that recitation might be enacted more ambitiously, most accounts of the purpose of recitation echo Nystrand (1997):

> The teacher asks a series of unrelated questions in order to assess how much students know and do not know, as well as to check completion of assigned work

> and to reinforce key points. . . .When recitation starts, remembering and guessing supplant student thinking. (p. 6)

If these are the purposes of getting students to talk, then the teacher-student-teacher-student pattern follows quite logically. Ask a question to check comprehension, take a student response, praise it if is right, nix it and take another response if it is wrong, and repeat. Other purposes, however, call for different forms of discourse.

We can move towards a definition of discussion by imagining the inverse of Nystrand's description of recitation. Rather than a series of unrelated questions, questions should build on one another and move towards some overarching instructional goal. In addition, if the goal is to get students to think—and to think together—the questions should be of a different nature than recitation-style questions. They should be designed to yield multiple responses, not just one right response. And if thinking is indeed the goal, to what end? Unlike recitation, the goal of which is to surface knowledge students were supposed to have entered the room knowing, discussion should facilitate the collaborative construction of new knowledge. Imagine an exchange in which one student has an idea, another student critiques that idea, and a third student builds on the second student's critique. Each new comment complicates or deepens the group's understanding of the material.

To be sure, this is all very utopian sounding, and discussions certainly do not unroll that smoothly in practice all of the time—it is the difficulty of leading discussions that motivates this study, after all—but such a conceptualization of discussion corresponds with much of what is found in the literature. For example, Dillon (1994) describes discussion as "a particular form of group interaction where members join

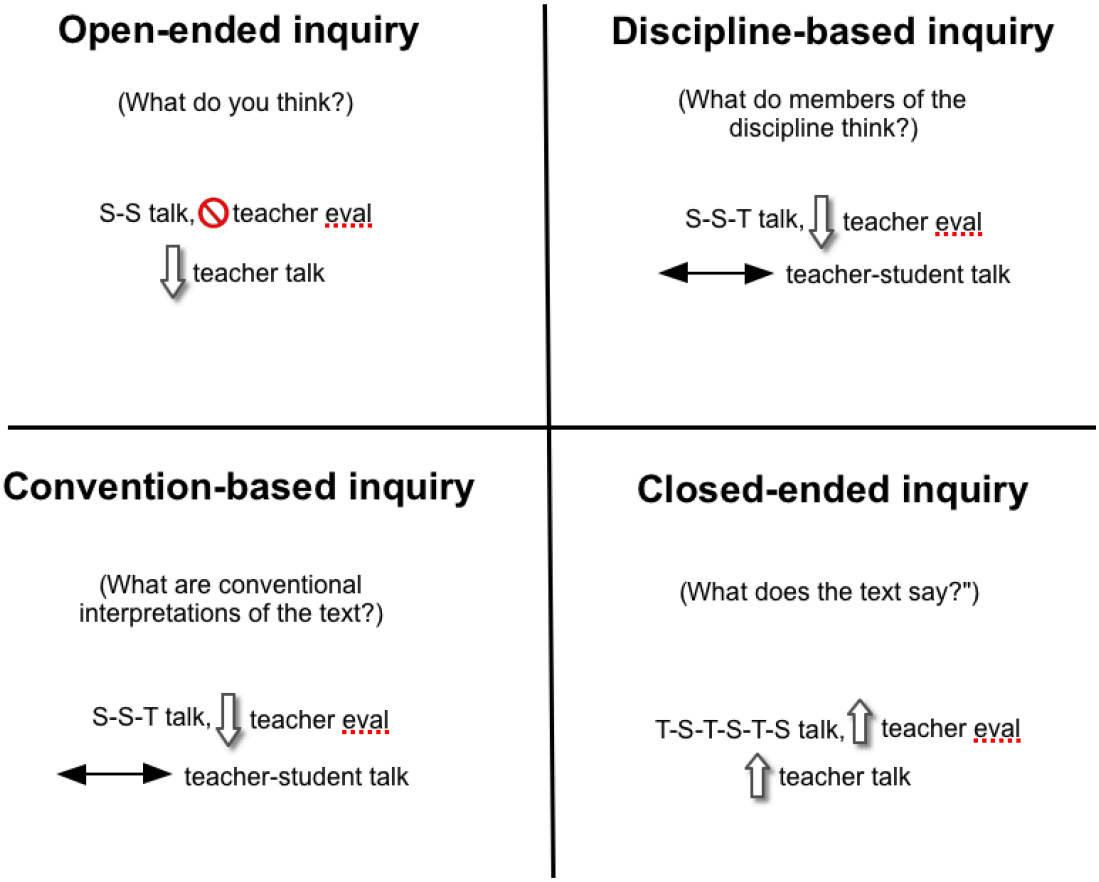
together in addressing a question of common concern, exchanging and examining different views to form their answer, enhancing their knowledge or understanding" (p. 8). Sounding a similar note, Parker (2003) describes discussion as "a kind of shared inquiry the desired outcomes of which rely on the expression and consideration of diverse views" (p. 129). In their seminal piece about literature study groups, Eeds and Wells (1989) argue that it is through discussion that a group "constructs and discloses deeper meaning, enriching understanding for all participants" (p. 5). The thread tying these elaborations together is the belief that discussion is a way for students to co-construct new knowledge or understanding through exploratory talk.

This description of discussion, although helpful in its crystallization of the goals of discussion in general, does not distinguish among the different possible purposes for initiating a discussion in a secondary ELA classroom. All discussions should have students co-constructing new knowledge through talk, but how this plays out in practice might look slightly different depending on the specific instructional purpose for the discussion. Specifically, the amount of teacher talk vis-à-vis student talk is going to vary. In Figure 2.1, I present a tentative matrix that outlines four possible instructional purposes and implications for how each purpose might influence discussion features like turn-taking and amount of teacher control over the discussion.[7] The reader will notice that I-R-E is absent from this matrix; this is not to say that I-R-E might not coexist with discussion, but that it, as Nystrand (1997) defines it, is not discussion. A final note: the instructional purposes represented in the matrix are not mutually exclusive; in fact, a single discussion is likely to involve some shifting among the purposes.

[7] I considered providing some text-specific questions to illuminate the differences among the four discussion purposes, but it is possible to ask the exact same question with a different purpose in mind.

Figure 2.1

Instructional purpose matrix



The upper left quadrant represents a common ideal for discussion in which students engage in some open-ended investigation of a text and the teacher takes more of a back seat. The upper right quadrant represents discussions in which the teacher and students apply disciplinary expertise to the text (e.g., "How might literary theory help us to interpret the text?"). There is space for open-ended inquiry, but the teacher may take more of an active role if students diverge from his/her goals or require more direct support. The lower left quadrant represents discussions in which the teacher and students test out conventional interpretations to the text (e.g., "A lot of people think Character X is an archetype for Y. Is there evidence from the text that supports this?") As with the

disciplinary-based discussion, the teacher may take more or less of an active role depending on students' needs. The lower right quadrant represents a discussion in which the teacher elicits students' ideas about the text but does permit a great deal of student-student talking, and ultimately steers students towards some understanding that he/she thinks is important for them to walk away with. This has some similarities to I-R-E, but departs from I-R-E in that its goal is not merely to check students' knowledge, but to support their evolving understanding of the text in a more directed way.

Now that I've touched upon some of the purposes for discussion (in addition to its universal purpose of supporting students in co-constructing knowledge together), I present here a set of working criteria—compiled from the literature and my own experience as a teacher and teacher educator—for what a good discussion looks like. Another way to frame these criteria are as an answer to the question: What are the qualities of a secondary ELA discussion that provides students with opportunities to co-construct knowledge together? I don't intend for these criteria to be definitive or exhaustive; however, I do think they cover the most basic ingredients of a good discussion and may go a good deal further than that. I also attempt to complicate these criteria somewhat by considering how the instructional purposes described above might recommend slightly differentiated definitions of "good."

Student-Generated. I employ this term "student-generated" to encompass several aspects of a good discussion. First, I refer simply to the fact that, in a good discussion, students should do a fair amount of the talking. This is not to say that there isn't space in a good discussion for the teacher to speak, but that if the teacher speaks too often, he/she risks overshadowing or crowding out student voices (Gutierrez, 1993). The right balance

of teacher-student talk will depend on a number of variables, including instructional purpose and text difficulty. Given this variability, there is no perfect formula for determining whether a discussion has achieved the right balance of teacher-student talk. That said, the basic truth remains that it is possible for a teacher to talk too much, and a good discussion, ultimately, cannot be dominated by the teacher. Relatedly, a good discussion should not be dominated by a handful of students, but feature an equitable distribution of participation. Again, there is no perfect formula for what is equitable and what is not, but a good discussion should not have glaring inequities (e.g., if only the boys talk). This becomes even more problematic when those inequities are a pattern across multiple discussions.

By "student-generated," I also mean to suggest that the lion's share of the intellectual or academic content generated during a good discussion should come from students. This is not just about how often students speak, but about the nature of what is said. For example, a teacher might speak, but if they are taking up a student's idea, then it might still be described as "student-generated." Conversely, if a student correctly answers a leading question (i.e., a question to which the teacher really only envisioned one correct answer), then it can't really be said to be "student-generated." Obviously, any time a teacher ask a question, he/she bounds the discussion. It is a way of saying, "Let's talk about *this* and not *that*." Thus, the discussion is already a little less student-generated in the sense that the students didn't generate the topic. I don't mean to suggest that a good discussion must be perfectly student-generated; I mean only to suggest that some, if not most, of the intellectual content generated during the discussion should come from students. This is an area where the teacher's specific instructional purpose will have

considerable influence; a teacher, for example, who wishes to lead a discipline-based discussion, as described above, will likely be required to generate more of the content than a teacher who wishes to lead an open-ended discussion.

This articulation of a good discussion corresponds with conceptualizations of dialogic teaching in the literature. Lyle (2008) writes that dialogic teaching "reflects a view that knowledge and understanding come from testing evidence, analyzing ideas and exploring values, rather than unquestioningly accepting somebody else's certainties" (p. 230). Put into the context of an English class, this would seem to parallel the distinction between supporting students in developing their own interpretations of a text (dialogic) and transmitting some authoritative interpretation (monologic). Nystrand et al. (1997) write, "What ultimately counts [in dialogic teaching] is the extent to which instruction requires students to think, not just report someone else's thinking" (p. 72). A good ELA discussion, then, would be one that gets students to explore a multiplicity of possible meanings in a text, and to weigh the strength of the evidence for those interpretations.

Rainey's (2016) recent work on disciplinary literacy in ELA also indirectly supports this articulation of a good discussion. Disciplinary literacy instruction is instruction that initiates students into disciplinary ways of constructing knowledge (Lee & Spratley, 2010; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Proponents of disciplinary literacy instruction argue that disciplinary practices will remain obscure to students unless they receive scaffolded opportunities to read, write, and think like disciplinarians do (e.g., Moje, 2015). Rainey's finding that literary scholars tend to approach texts as a kind of literary puzzle to which there is rarely a single right answer suggests that students, if they are to be initiated into the disciplinary practices of ELA, will need

opportunities to identify and explore literary puzzles. Additionally, Rainey found that the scholars conceived of their academic work as a social activity—that is, their interpretations of texts did not exist in a vacuum but were in deep and constant conversation with other scholars' interpretations. Although the scholars did not necessarily mean that those conversations happened out loud, it does seem like discussion would be an essential way to facilitate collaborative inquiry in a k-12 ELA classroom. And if those discussions are going to be truly disciplinary, they need to support the kind of literary puzzling that the scholars describe—puzzling that ought to be largely student-generated (which, importantly, does not preclude it from being tightly scaffolded by the teacher.)

Finally, I also employ "student-generated" to signify that, in a good discussion, students should have some control over where the discussion goes. What the teacher wants to talk about may not correspond exactly with what students want to talk about. If a student makes a comment that diverges from the teacher's plan for the discussion—and is not completely off topic—the teacher should be prepared to give that comment some airtime. Although this does not seem to be an especial focus of the existing research on discussion, there are a few notable studies in which the authors make a case for giving students some control over the discussion agenda and how strict teacher control of the dialogic space inhibits student ideas (e.g., Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Edwards & Furlong, 1978; Langer, 2001; Villaume, Worden, Williams, Hopkins, & Rosenblatt, 1994; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

Focused on learning goals. After the paragraphs on dialogic teaching and disciplinary literacy instruction, this criterion of a good discussion may seem self-

evident, but it bears mentioning anyway. A good discussion must attend to some ELA-specific learning goal. Most likely, this means textual analysis of some kind, but it's conceivable that a good ELA discussion might be about something other than a text. Henning, Nielsen, Henning, and Schulz (2003) report that a discussion "must serve an educational purpose, that is, the discussion must engage and extend student thinking beyond their previous experiences" (p. 123). A discussion might meet all of the other criteria for a good discussion, but if it does not, at some point, attend to specific ELA learning goals, it could not in the end be considered a good discussion, or at the very least, the best possible version of that discussion. Take a discussion on *Romeo and Juliet*. A pretty classic discussion starter might be to ask, "Do *you* believe in love at first sight?" This is a topic that most high-schoolers have something to say about, and so is likely to lead into a spirited discussion. However, if the discussion—or the lesson/unit of which the discussion is a part—never returns to the actual text—say, by asking, "Does Shakespeare believe in love at first sight?"—then it is reasonable to question what exactly the discussion achieved. Yes, students were making arguments and listening to one another—both of which are important ELA skills—but it's also true that one might hear similar conversations if one were to eavesdrop on students' conversations during lunchtime in the cafeteria. I'm not saying the text-less discussion is bad per se—getting students to engage enthusiastically with ideas is a victory in itself—just that it would've been better if it had moved from the personal to the textual.

Coherent. By "coherence," I refer to the extent to which students' comments are in conversation with one another. Lots of students talking does not necessarily equal a good discussion. Students must be talking to each other. According to Langer (2001), the

academic benefits of discussion stem from the way in which it asks students to engage in "shared cognition," or to "sharpen their understandings with, against, and from each other" (p. 872). Similarly, Larson (2000) argues that one of discussion's chief virtues lies in its potential to expose students to multiple perspectives, facilitating a process of self-evaluation in which students compare their ideas to others'. Indeed, in the majority of studies that find some benefit to having discussions—academic and otherwise—those benefits are inextricable from students talking to and learning from one another (e.g., Avery, 2002; Dillon, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Fisher, 1996; Losey, 1995; Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999.)

In a good discussion, then, students actively connect their ideas to what other students have said, and if they do not, the teacher takes action to facilitate that connection. A discussion that lacks this important connective tissue might be more accurately categorized as a brainstorm, a form of classroom discourse in which students take turns sharing ideas that they came up with independently. Without connecting to one another, there is little opportunity for students to "co-construct" new knowledge. This is also where listening comes in. The ability to connect meaningfully to another student's idea is predicated on first having listened carefully and generously to that idea. Listening in general is not a great measure of a good discussion since it is not something that can be reliably observed. Without giving a test, it is impossible to know for certain how well students were listening. The student who was covertly looking at his/her phone may, in fact, have been listening quite well; meanwhile, the student who was looking at the speaker and nodding enthusiastically may have been daydreaming. That is why I tend to refer to listening in the context of students responding to one another. In that case,

listening is observable in the student's response. Additionally, there are observable conditions that make listening objectively difficult—for example, an extraordinarily noisy classroom—and I will note those when I see them.

Respectful. If students are going to feel empowered to share their thoughts publicly, they must feel like their ideas are going to be received with a baseline amount of respect, by the teachers and by their peers. They must be confident that they will be taken seriously as thinkers, and that if their thinking is unclear or off-the-mark, it will be challenged without being ridiculed or summarily dismissed. Michaels et al. (2008) argue that without a healthy collaborative culture, students are less likely to "take the risk of going public with good but as yet poorly formulated ideas, ideas that might be wrong but productive, or ideas that might challenge the status quo" (p. 292). In a study of special education students in inclusion classrooms, Okolo et al. (2007) found that the special education students were more likely to participate in discussions when there was a firmly established classroom culture based on respect and tolerance.

Discussions come with risks that are avoided by more teacher-centered practices. Anytime a teacher gives the floor over to students—as they must in a good discussion—there is the very real possibility that a student will say something that offends another student or a group of students. This is probably especially the case in an ELA or History class in which sensitive topics like race, religion, and sexuality come up. Did the student say something that was truly insensitive? Did the offended student(s) listen ungenerously? Either way, it is a situation that demands some action on the part of the teacher. Rather than to be avoided, some scholars have argued that discussions on potentially controversial topics, during which students might be exposed to views that

make them uncomfortable, are essential to developing a more tolerant citizenry (e.g., Avery, 2002; Hess, 2009). Be that as it may, it still presents unique challenges to a teacher. Additionally, it is possible for disrespect to be conferred in less dramatic ways. For example, a student may come to perceive that the teacher or the rest of the class never takes up his/her ideas. A good discussion is certainly not without its hiccups; however, a discussion in which students (speakers or listeners) leave feeling disrespected cannot, at the end of the day, be considered a good discussion.

In sum, good discussions are *student-generated*, *focused on learning goals*, *coherent*, and *respectful*. Moreover, a discussion is good if students collaboratively arrive at some new understanding about the text or topic at hand. To be sure, this is a high bar. And it is important to keep in mind that a discussion might meet some criteria of a good discussion but fall short on others. A quick anecdote to illustrate this possibility: A friend of mine teaches a discussion-based literature class at the university level. He was commiserating with me recently about a couple of very difficult classes, "difficult" in the sense that the discussions were very slow and plodding, and students were becoming frustrated. Now in his fifteenth year of teaching, my friend was able to take a broader perspective on the matter. Perhaps, he said, there is a trajectory for a discussion-based class. Perhaps some difficult discussions must happen *before* the really successful discussion can happen. I don't share this anecdote to make a claim about a universal trajectory; I share it in order to exemplify the trouble with applying a universal conceptualization of "good" to discussions without consideration of context. If October's difficult, stilted discussion prepared students to have a livelier, more participatory discussion in February, then wasn't October's discussion good in some significant way?

With this in mind, I don't intend to use this conceptualization of a good discussion to indict the discussions that I observe, but, rather, to better understand them, to consider both their merits and their shortcomings vis-à-vis their specific classroom and instructional contexts.

What Do We Know About *How* to Lead a Good Discussion?

With this as my guiding definition of a good discussion, I return to one of the guiding questions of this study, "What practices are vital to leading good secondary ELA discussions?" In other words, if we, as teacher educators, were going to tell a group of secondary ELA teachers what they could do to make their discussions better, what would we tell them? A good deal of the literature on discussion is plagued by a lack of practical advice for teachers. These accounts of discussion have a tendency to hover above the action, describing discussion in its ideal abstract form without touching down long enough to describe what teachers do to make good discussions happen. Take this description of "open discussion" from Applebee et al. (2003):

> When conditions are right, especially following student uptake of authentic questions and other 'dialogic bids' offered by the teacher, the result is an open discussion in which teachers and their students work out understandings face-to-face—the quintessential form of dialogic interaction. When this happens, the teacher's role is mainly one of starting and keeping the ball rolling. (p. 700)

While this description of discussion neatly highlights the collaborative meaning making that discussions can enable, it skirts over the work of the teacher. One might read that description and think that leading a discussion is really just a matter of asking an authentic question and getting out of the way, or, as the authors state rather cryptically,

"keeping the ball rolling." What can a teacher do to keep the ball rolling? Or what about when the ball stops dead in its tracks before an understanding has been "worked out"? Also, what "conditions" must be right in order to have an open discussion? Does a teacher have control over those conditions? If so, what can he/she do to ensure that they are, in fact, right? It is my assumption that much of the work of leading a discussion lies in the answers to such questions, and that there remains much to be learned about the inner workings of this important and demanding practice.

That said, there does exist a rich but underdeveloped body of work on what teachers do to lead good discussions. In the following paragraphs, I parse the existing research on leading discussions into groupings that roughly correspond with the four criteria of good discussions that I outlined above. For example, in the first section, I summarize key findings and assertions in the literature about how to lead "student-generated" discussions. The analytical boundaries that separate the groupings are not hard and fast. Depending on how a practice is enacted, it might fall into any of the four groupings. For simplicity's sake, I identify a practice's chief purpose and place it in the grouping that most aligns with that purpose.

Leading "student-generated" discussions. The one area of leading discussions that does not suffer from a lack of elaboration in the literature is asking authentic questions. An authentic question is a question without "a prespecified answer" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). In contrast to recitation-style questions that are designed to efficiently quiz students on information they are supposed to already know—what Mehan (1979) calls "known information questions"—authentic questions are designed to elicit multiple responses. They are not asked with a right answer in mind. They invite

interpretation and collaboration. They convey the teacher's interest in students' ideas (Nystrand et al., 1997). By asking authentic questions, a teacher opens up the possibility for student-generated discourse. This may seem obvious, but if a teacher does not ask questions that invite discussion, then a discussion is unlikely to be the result. As Michaels et al. (2008) write, "In order for the students to [have discussions], there have to be interesting and complex ideas to talk and argue about" (p. 287). Dillon (1983) identifies teacher questions as one of the chief culprits when discussions go badly.

The difference between authentic questions ("open") and known information questions ("closed") is often described as merely a matter of form. The general logic goes, authentic questions are questions to which there are many possible answers (or at the very least two compelling possible answers), whereas known information questions typically take the form of yes/no questions or basic comprehension questions. However, there is more to a question than merely its form. We must also consider the intent with which it was asked. Edwards and Furlong (1978) describe how an authentic question might not be so authentic after all:

> Many questions which appear to be open are closed because of the context in which they are asked (perhaps the teacher has recently provided "the" answer), or because the teacher has clear criteria of relevance or adequacy or correctness of expression to which he refers in evaluating the answers. The narrowness of the question only appears in what happens next. (p. 41)

In other words, if the intent of the question is to elicit a specific "right" answer, then it's not really an authentic question, no matter its surface appearance. Conversely, a question

that appears to be a known-information question may actually be in service of more dialogic ends. Boyd and Markarian (2015) elaborate

> It is not the syntax of the question that sustains and supports rich classroom oracy practices, but rather what it asks the student to do, and how it is taken up in a classroom community. If a question, whether open or closed in form, is contingent on student contributions and positions the student for further exploration and articulation, then its function is to strengthen and support thinking. (p. 277)

Evaluating the authentic-ness of a question, then, is more than just determining whether it appears open or closed (or even appears as a question at all), but understanding its function within the larger discussion (Wells & Arauz, 2006). Was it used to support further exploration? Or was it used to limit that exploration? A teacher might have good reason to limit students' exploration; however, if one were to imagine a spectrum with "teacher-generated" on one end and "student-generated" on the other, any move that limits students' exploration pushes the discussion toward the teacher-generated side.

Let's now assume that the teacher does successfully ask an authentic question with the intention of eliciting multiple interpretations from students. What next? One possibility is simply getting out of the way and letting students talk, what might be called opening the floor (e.g., see Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003). Some teachers may be too quick to follow up their original question with additional questions, a tendency that could actually impede the discussion (e.g., Dillon, 1985; Myhill, 2006; Wood & Wood, 1988). Nystrand et al. (2003) found that students were more likely to ask their own questions during a discussion when the teacher ceased to ask follow-up

questions. Relatedly, Eeds and Wells (1989) found that, in the context of small group discussions, students were more likely to take on intellectual responsibility when teachers stepped out of their role as "gentle inquisitor."

The advice to not get in the way of one's own discussion is well taken; however, there are also ways in which a teacher can intervene on a discussion to make it richer and more student-generated. Indeed, it would be naïve to assume that all it takes to produce an engaged and meaningful discussion is to ask an authentic question and get out of the way. Participating successfully in a discussion demands both a basic understanding of the text or topic that is under discussion and a command of the discursive skills on which good discussions depend. In other words, most students are going to need some support if they are going to generate the kind of content I argue is essential to a good discussion. I suspect this is especially true if the students do not have a lot of experience participating in discussions, or for whom the ground rules for discussion, which the teacher may take for granted, are obscure.

The research base on how to scaffold students' successful participation in discussions is wide-ranging. A small subset of studies examines the work that teachers do before discussions. For example, Lee (2001) describes one exemplary teacher's approach to preparing students to have discussions:

> Again, daily, the teacher asked each student to write down ideas about a passage in question on one of the routine artifacts used in the class. Daily routines might involve asking questions about a target passage, making observations of salient details from a passage, or making inferences from a character's actions or descriptions. This was always done before the class discussion. (p. 116)

Similarly, Barker (2015) identifies giving students "structured opportunities for students to practice thinking and speaking in smaller groups while simultaneously grappling with texts and questions that would guide discussion" as an important means of scaffolding students' thinking and speaking during whole class discussions (p.98). Villaume et al. (1994) describe using literature logs as a way to prepare students for discussion.

All of these techniques are united by an intention to activate students' thinking before shifting into a whole class discussion format. That way, when the discussion is initiated, students already have something to say, even if it's still not very well formulated. To use an analogy, asking students to write on a question or discuss the question in a small group before opening it up the whole class is a little warming up a car before driving it. An additional purpose of the strategies described above is to scaffold students' reading. After all, if students struggled to read a text, they are going to struggle to talk about it. This suggests that discussions ought to be paired with explicit attention to expert reading strategies. Relatedly, Sandora, Beck, & McKeown (1999) found that initiating discussion during reading —as opposed to after reading—led to more effective discussions as measured by students' performance on post-discussion reading assessments. They argue that initiating the discussion after reading assumes that students understood the text, whereas initiating discussion during reading "scaffolds students' comprehension processes by providing opportunities for students to reflect on events and ideas as they are encountered and to examine connections that accumulate." Moreover, they argue that this approach is particularly effective for lower-achieving students.

Another tributary of this research emphasizes the need to scaffold students' facility with the norms or rules for participation in a discussion. Mercer, Wegerif, and

Dawes (1999) found that explicit ground rules for "exploratory talk" supported students in collaboratively solving reasoning problems. Some of these rules were procedural ("all in the group are encouraged to speak by other group members") and others were more epistemological in nature ("reasons are expected;" "challenges are accepted") (pp. 98-99). The rationale for explicitly teaching ground rules for discussion is that students may be unfamiliar with how to have a productive discussion (i.e., what kinds of discursive moves are helpful moves). The Mercer et al. study is discipline-agnostic, but this principle would seem to be especially true for disciplinary norms for discussion. Barker (2016) describes a technique called "side coaching" that she developed to support students' ability to co-construct knowledge about a text. She defines side coaching as "giving immediate, public, verbal feedback" on students' discursive moves during a discussion (p. 23). This technique might be applied to leading discussions in any discipline, but she explicates it in the context of ELA discussions. For example, she describes pausing a discussion about a novel to remind a student to give the group the page number and to wait a moment while everybody finds the page. Additionally, she establishes discursive goals for a discussion (e.g., "In this discussion, we're going to work on making explicit connections to previous speakers' ideas") and targets her side coaching to support students in meeting those goals.

Relatedly, teacher modeling has been shown to have a positive effect on students' acquisition of discursive skills (e.g., Langer, 2001; Lee, 1995; 2001; Villaume et al., 1994; Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, & Anderson, 1995). Students may need to see discursive norms in action—and, ideally, broken down into their composite parts in a transparent manner—before they can apply them themselves. There are social justice implications to

this explicit focus on rules and/or norms. Michaels et al. (2008) note that discursive norms are "differentially available" to students in their homes and communities. In other words, some groups of students may have more or less access to those norms outside of school. It is not just a matter of teaching students how to have a good English discussion; it is also a matter of teaching students the language of power (e.g., Delpit, 1986; Lee, 2001). Importantly, this does not mean devaluing or overriding students' natural discursive resources; rather, it means finding creative ways to bridge the discursive resources that students developed at home and in their communities with the discursive norms of the discipline (e.g., Dillon, 1989; Lee, 2001).

In addition to activating students' thinking leading up to discussions and scaffolding students' command of discursive norms, teachers can also act to support students in developing their reasoning during discussions. One strategy for deepening students' thinking about a text is using the personal, or prompting students to connect their own lives to the text. In her study of a secondary ELA classroom composed primarily of struggling readers, Lee (2001) notes that "the most intense and interactional discussions occurred when students had opportunities to link their home and community experiences in meaningful ways to extend the thinking about a passage" (p. 117). Significantly, Lee does not lose sight of the text; at some point, students must ponder how their personal experiences illuminate the text.[8] Thus, teachers who employ this strategy must also be prepared to bring the discussion back to the text if students do not do so themselves. (More on this in the section on leading discussions that are "focused on learning goals.")

[8] The English teacher in me wants to note that, ideally, there is a reciprocal relationship at work here. The personal can illuminate the text, but the text can also illuminate the personal.

There are also in-the-moment moves that teachers can make to scaffold students' thinking and speaking. Waggoner et al. (1995) draw attention to the fact that students' initial responses often lack elaboration. For example, in response to, say, a question about a character's motivation, a student might offer a response like, "I think Character X did it because she was really mad." Waggoner et al. suggest that teachers ought to be prepared to press for further elaboration by "asking for clarification" and "asking for evidence" (e.g., Why do you think she was mad? Can you show us in the text?"). Grossman, Hammerness, and McDonald (2009) refer to these kinds of moves as "eliciting further thinking." Teachers, they argue, should "know what questions to ask the student, and how to phrase them, in that moment…in order to find out what the student is thinking" (p. 280). The goal is to ask the right questions to reveal the student's underlying logic, not just to the teacher but to other students as well (Kazemi & Hintz, 2008). Additional components of this work include anticipating the range of possible student responses to a discussion question and identifying which student ideas to linger on (Grossman et al., 2009).

Relatedly, the extent to which teachers take up students' responses has an effect on both the depth of reasoning and the student-centeredness of a discussion. Teacher contributions that take up student ideas are often described as "uptake" (Collins, 1982; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Nystrand et al., 1997). This might look like asking for clarification or evidence, or it might look like piggybacking on a student's idea to ask a related but new question. It also might look like summarizing or restating a student's response and asking the rest of the class what they think about it (more on this in the section on "leading 'coherent' discussions"). Because this practice is so deeply improvisational, it

cannot be practiced ahead of time and executed mechanically (i.e., teachers cannot predict what students will say; therefore, they cannot plan uptake). It must emerge organically from students' ideas, and if it fails to be responsive to those ideas, it is not really uptake. Nystrand (1997) calls this kind of discourse "jointly determined—in character, scope, and direction—by both teachers and students" because "teachers pick up on, elaborate, and question what students say" (p. 6).

A final and oft-repeated piece of advice that is often given to teachers who are trying to initiate student talk is to wait at least three seconds after asking a question, what is called wait time. A slower pace of questioning is correlated with greater numbers of student responses (Honea, 1982) and greater complexity of student responses (Fagan, Hassler, & Szabl, 1981). The advice to use wait time is so commonplace as to have become a kind of maxim for teachers (akin to "don't smile until November"). However, an additional element of that advice that—in my experience—often gets left out is that teachers should also practice wait time after students' responses. Rowe (1986) found that teachers that pause after students' responses exhibit greater flexibility, ask fewer but more complex questions, and are more likely to take up students' responses in their next question or contribution.

Leading discussions that are "focused on learning goals." I note above that, in a good discussion, students ought to have some control over where the discussion goes. The question, then, is when do teachers need to step in and exert more control so that the discussion is more educationally purposeful? There are no easy answers to this question, and the literature is relatively silent on the matter. As Lee (2001) writes, the right balance of teacher-directed and student-generated discourse "remains an open question, which is

of particular import when orchestrating intellectually rigorous discussions among low-achieving students" (p. 105). On the one hand, if students are speaking energetically to one another, that means they're engaged. On the other hand, if they've moved too far away from the text, then they're missing opportunities to develop their abilities as readers. I suspect Lee notes that finding the right balance is especially important for "low-achieving students" because, as struggling readers, finding ways to engage them in a text is critical, but they also stand to lose the most by participating in discussions that are engaging but educationally lacking. The literature that discusses the importance of blending monologic and dialogic instruction may also offer some guidance here. However, this small body of work is more concerned with complicating dualistic conceptions of classroom discourse (monologic versus dialogic) than it is with elaborating a set of methods for determining and enacting the right balance. In other words, and to repeat Lee, it "remains an open question."

Leading "coherent" discussions. Wells and Arauz (2006) write:

> The single most important action a teacher can take to shift the interaction from monologic to dialogic is to ask questions to which there are multiple possible answers and then to encourage the students who wish to answer to respond to, and build upon, each other's contributions. (p. 414)

The key to a leading a coherent discussion—that is, a discussion in which student comments build on one another rather than exist in isolation—is getting students to talk to one another. This is not easy! Monologic, teacher-centered forms of discourse are so hardwired into our collective DNA that students might not understand at first that they are to have a discussion with each other and not just with the teacher. Just as teachers

should be prepared to scaffold their students' reasoning by asking for clarification or asking for evidence, they should also be prepared to scaffold what Lemke (1982) calls "cross-discussion," or dialogue among students.

For students to respond to another student's comment, they first need to have heard the comment. Mercer (2002) writes about the importance of restating students' comments. In addition to giving students another opportunity to hear the comment, this strategy serves to "give [the comment] general prominence, or to encourage an alternative" (pp 52-56). With regards to encouraging an alternative, imagine a teacher saying something like, "So Jonathan says George's decision to kill Lenny was an act of mercy" with a raised eyebrow or a tone that suggests there is more to say. In a slight variation on restating a student's comment word for word, Wells and Arauz (2006) describe a teacher move they call "reformulation" whereby the teacher paraphrases a student's comment in order to make it more accessible to other students and to "establish a clear basis for development or disagreement" (p. 420).

O'Connor and Michaels (1993; 2007) describe a teacher move that is akin to reformulation where the teacher asks the student if they've got their idea right: e.g., "So let me see if I understand what you're saying…" They call this strategy "revoicing" and argue that it shifts power dynamics in the classroom: "…the student is positioned as a thinker or theorizer, the holder of a noteworthy idea, theory, or explanation." Additionally, it facilitates a kind of role reversal; the student evaluates the teacher's formulation, rather than the other way around. Barker (2015) describes a strategy called "posting" in which the teacher explicitly invites students to respond to one another by asking questions like, "Does anyone disagree?" "Would anyone like to expand on X's

point?" or "Could someone help X out?" (p. 99) All of these strategies support students in talking with each other, and, by extension, in having a more coherent discussion.

Leading "respectful" discussions. Getting students to talk to one another means that they might disagree with one another. This means that teachers must take action to ensure that no student feels disrespected by his/her peers. What does it look like to disagree respectfully? Are there cultural differences for what this looks like? If so, how should a teacher manage a disagreement between two students who bring different cultural attitudes about disagreement to the table? Even setting aside the possibility for disagreement, saying an idea out loud might feel like a huge risk for some students (especially if the topic under discussion is a sensitive one), and, thus, teachers should create a classroom culture that supports students in taking that risk.

The literature that takes discussion as its central subject does not actually provide much concrete advice for how to create the kind of classroom culture that supports discussion beyond asserting that such a culture is, indeed, important. There is a small subset of studies that approach discussion tangentially as an aspect of effective schooling for some marginalized group of students, and these studies sometimes discuss classroom culture. For example, in a microethnography of a predominantly Black secondary ELA classroom, Dillon (1989) found that their "effective" White teacher created an "open, risk free environment" by building relationships with students, making time for them, and making them feel good about themselves. In a summary of Garcia, Flores, Moll, Prieto, and Zucker's (1988) unpublished study on effective schooling for Hispanic students, Losey (1997) writes that successful classrooms—and, by extension, successful

discussions—have "very informal, almost 'familial' relationships between teachers and students" (p. 12).

One implication of these findings is that a teacher's respect for students (or lack thereof) communicates powerful messages about students' ability to contribute meaningfully to a discussion. Ladson-Billings (1995) and Lee (2001) describe pedagogies based on a deep belief in students' innate abilities. Conversely, Fisher and Larkin (2008) found that teachers' deficit perspectives of their students' home lives and language use undermined their attempts to create an environment conducive to discussion. Another—albeit difficult-to-prove—implication of these findings is that teachers' respect for students translates to students' respect for one another. In effect, the teachers model what it looks like to treat one another with kindness and generosity and students, hopefully, follow suit.

Taken together, the practices described above form a wide-ranging body of practical knowledge about what teachers might need to do to lead good discussions. The question, then, is what can this study add to this body of knowledge? As I argue in Chapter One, the research base on discussion is limited by both its fragmentation and—with the exception of a few ethnographic studies that only tangentially address discussion—its focus on isolated, decontextualized teaching moves. In contrast, this study moves towards a *practice* of leading discussions, by which I mean to include both teaching moves and the underlying pedagogical commitments that animate and unify those moves. I turn to Boyd and Markarian's (2015) explication of "instructional stance" to justify the scope of this study.

Instructional stance, according to Boyd and Markarian, is revealed not just by the surface features of classroom dialogue, but by the prevailing function of that dialogue. Some discourse structures considered to be solidly dialogic may, in fact, mask less dialogic functions, and vice versa. This requires looking beyond discourse structures like "authentic questions" or "asking clarification questions" to the function(s) of those moves and the larger contexts in which they occur. Here they clarify what this shift entails:

> To discern a dialogic instructional stance…requires more than a focus on isolated snapshots of outward appearance. It requires a consideration of the interconnected interactional, cognitive, and relational dimensions of classroom talk (Lefstein, 2010), their simultaneous epistemic and communal functions (Rubin, 1990), and how they support teaching and learning across time and in the classroom environment as a whole (Alexander, 2008). (p. 273)

My goal, then, is to go beyond outward appearance, to see beyond the crest of the wave to the tide that pulls beneath. This necessitates a kind of back and forth between individual teaching moves and the larger discursive context that gives shape and meaning to those moves. In doing so, I present a portrait of leading discussions that situates individual teaching moves in their larger discursive context(s), and that seeks to better understand "how discourse features work together across a repertoire of talk structures and functions" (Boyd & Markarian, 2015, p. 279).

Relatedly, another limitation of the studies drawn on for this literature review is that most tend to limit their analyses to the discussions themselves (with the exception of sometimes describing what teachers do directly before discussions). This has the effect of cutting discussions off from some potentially life-giving (or life-taking) sources. By

spending a month in each teacher's classroom, observing and videotaping not just the discussions, but everything that happens around the discussions, I position myself to discern connections, contingencies, and contradictions that might otherwise go unseen. In short, I place the work of leading discussions back into its communal, institutional, and curricular contexts.

In addition, the matrix that I introduce on page 38 provides a tool for assessing teachers' instructional purposes that resists overly simplistic dichotomies like monologic versus dialogic, teacher-centered versus student-centered, teacher-generated versus student-generated, etc. The four criteria for a good discussion, starting on page 39, provide theoretically-grounded dimensions along which a discussion (and a teacher's practice) might be analyzed, keeping in mind that these criteria represent a kind of dialogic ideal and that there are many reasons why a discussion might not meet all of those criteria but still not be "bad" per se. In tandem, these analytical frames both anchor the data and provide a multidimensional toolkit for analyzing the features of whole-class discourse.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

This study has two goals: 1) to describe the components of leading discussions in secondary ELA classrooms, and 2) to analyze the relationships among those components. In a way, the first goal is concerned with breaking the practice down and the second goal is concerned with putting it back together. To investigate my research questions, I used constant comparative analysis (CCA), drawing on data that I compiled from four secondary ELA classrooms. I spent 3-4 weeks in each classroom, collecting observational data, not just of the teachers leading discussions but of the larger instructional and sociocultural contexts of which the discussions were a part. Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and students and stimulated recall interviews with teachers. Using CCA, I looked across the teachers to identify patterns and to develop my interpretations of those patterns. This chapter describes these data and my methods of analysis.

Rationale for Study Design

Most existing studies on discussion focus solely on the moves that teachers make. For example, what percentage of the teacher's questions were "authentic questions"? How much "open discussion" occurred? How often did the teacher "take up" student ideas? In such analyses, these moves are often removed from the complexity that I argue defines the work of leading a discussion. This study aims to contribute to this work on teacher moves, but it seeks to situate those moves within their larger instructional and sociocultural contexts. For this reason, I did not limit my observation to

discussions, as the majority of previous studies have done. Instead, I set out to get a more holistic picture of the teachers' respective pedagogies, including practices that would not seem to be directly discussion-related. Additionally, I center teachers' own accounts of the work that they do to lead good discussions, and use observational data to corroborate, extend, and sometimes complicate those accounts.

Research Participants and Contexts

This study involves 4 participants in total, not counting the students. Each teacher taught in a different school context. Data collection occurred from November 2015-May 2016. In the following section, I describe how I selected and recruited the teachers. I also provide brief profiles of the teachers and their school contexts. (See Table 3.1 for a quick reference version.)

Selection Criteria & Recruiting

A significant constraint on my selection criteria stemmed from my research topic. One of the challenges of studying a practice that, as I've said, does not happen very often, is that it's difficult to find teachers who do that practice. Add to this the understandable difficulty of obtaining permission to do research in schools and/or school districts, and suddenly, the potential pool of teachers is quite small. This is all just to say that it was not easy to find teachers, which had consequences for my sample. I could not exert strict control over every variable. For example, though I hoped to find teachers who taught in roughly similar contexts, the teachers' school contexts ended up varying considerably. I also had to compromise on the racial diversity of my sample. Given the sociocultural underpinnings of discussion, I hypothesized that the cultural backgrounds of the teachers might have significant influence on their approach to discussion, particularly if their

backgrounds matched the background of their students. Thus, I wanted to capture some of this potential variety in my sample. However, I had to be flexible on this preference as all of the teachers who were recommended to me by people in my network happened to be White. This is likely due to the whiteness of the teaching force overall, and also to the racially segregated nature of social networks; as a white person myself, it was more likely that my network would direct me towards white teachers.[9] Their classrooms, on the other hand, were relatively diverse spaces (more on this below), with the exception of one classroom, which was predominantly African-American.

In order to minimize potential variability that could be attributed to developmental difference, I limited my study to three 10th grade ELA teachers and one 9th grade ELA teacher. I also required that the teachers 1) frequently (at least twice a week) engaged in text-based discussions about literature, 2) taught classes with greater than 20 students, and 3) had not "looped" with their students (i.e., hadn't had them as students the year prior), and 4) were not "beginning" teachers (< three years). The teachers were all recruited from high schools in a Midwestern state, all of which were within a thirty-mile radius of one another. Two taught in large (>1000), comprehensive public schools, and two taught in smaller charter schools. Two of the teachers were females; two were males. All of the teachers were between 35 and 45 years old. I did not ask the teachers to change anything about their regular instruction, though it is possible that the teachers were influenced to do more discussion because of my presence. The specific content of their classes varied, though all four were united by a focus on interpreting texts.

[9] I should also note that the districts in the area where it would've been more likely to find teachers of color proved to be harder to access as a researcher.

To recruit the teachers, I sought recommendations from people in my social network with connections in nearby schools and school districts. Although all of the teachers were recommended to me by a professional or personal acquaintance, I did not personally know any of the teachers who ended up participating in the study. Once I received a recommendation, I followed up by sending the teacher an email describing the purpose of the study and asking for more information about their classes. If their response suggested that they were interested in participating and that they might be a good fit, I arranged a personal visit to their classroom. During this visit, I asked the teachers to describe their pedagogy more thoroughly. I wanted to a) determine the extent to which discussion was, in fact, a key component of their pedagogy and b) confirm that if I spent a month in their classroom, I was likely to see a fair amount of discussion. A secondary aim of these visits was to begin building trust with the teacher. Once I was satisfied that a teacher would be a good fit and the teacher agreed to participate in the study, I set about obtaining the necessary permissions at the school and/or district level.

One teacher urged me to visit her third period class because the students in her first period class were still half-asleep and, therefore, not very talkative. Another teacher presented two options, one of which was very boy-heavy (28 boys to 6 girls) and, by his account, rowdier than his other classes. I elected to observe this class because I was curious to see how he managed the gender disparity and the classroom management issues, particularly in the context of discussion. The other two teachers taught only one class that fit my requirements.

Teacher and School Context Profiles (in order of observation)[10]

[10] All of the names in this study have been replaced by pseudonyms.

I. Daniel

Daniel is a large man, both physically and personality-wise. His red beard and his frumpy but professional style (Star Wars tie, tucked in shirt, worn dress shoes) give him the look of someone who would be equally at home in a bohemian café or a Comic-Con convention. In front of the class, Daniel is confident, charismatic, and playful. As someone who self-identifies as a public speaker, he has no problem performing on the podium. Luckily for his listeners, he is enjoyable to listen to, a skilled and engaging extemporaneous speaker. As Daniel freely acknowledges: "I'm not a quiet person."

These facts alone make Daniel an interesting choice for this study as one might assume that someone who is so good at capturing his audience would have a hard time letting go, or that his students, accustomed to Daniel doing the talking, would be slow to speak even when given the opportunity. In addition, he is the kind of teacher who may not be the most accessible model for novice teachers because so much of what he does in the classroom is an outgrowth of his big and difficult-to-replicate personality. That said, his methods—which, I believe, are replicable—reflect a deep commitment to discussion, making them a rich site for reflection on discussion-based teaching.

The Context

Daniel teaches at an International Baccalaureate (IB) charter school. Students must apply to be admitted, providing both academic and discipline records in the process. Daniel's class had 24 students (56% White, 24% Arab-American, 12% African-American, 8% Asian-American, and girls outnumbering boys by a nearly 2 to 1 margin), not a single one of whom, in my short time there, presented as academically disinterested. This is not to say that students did not have bad days or that a student never once put

his/her head down, just that this kind of behavior was the anomaly. And while I make no claims of association between conventional markers of academic success and participating robustly in academic discussions, it is important to acknowledge that Daniel was operating within a school with a strong academic culture, where most, if not all, students self-identified as college bound.

Students spoke openly about how rigorous the school is, though it is unclear what they were comparing it to. One student said, "It feels like fitting all four years of high school into freshman and sophomore year." According to both Daniel and the students, discussion was a fairly common occurrence across all grade levels and disciplines. When students enter 9th grade, they are given a protocol called QARE for participating in discussions where, before making a comment, they must indicate whether they intend to ask a Question, Answer a question, Rebut someone's response, or Extend someone's response. In addition, one of the IB curriculum's final assessments is a twenty-minute one-on-one discussion with a teacher about a poem. Out of the four school contexts, Daniel's context provided the most structural support for the use of discussion.

Discussions in Daniel's Class

Daniel's approach to discussion is distinguished by a format that he calls the "graded discussion." In graded discussions, students have an hour-long, text-based discussion during which they must contribute three original ideas in order to get credit and Daniel himself does not speak. Sometimes Daniel launches the discussion with a question ("Was the movie a good adaptation of the book?"); other times he merely establishes the focal text(s) and it is a student who asks the opening question. During the discussion, Daniel stands at the white board, tallying student comments and recording

what he can of the discussion. He intervenes at the end to summarize some of the stronger ideas that came out of the discussion and to attend to misunderstandings, if there were any. These discussions, as one might expect, are supported by a great deal of scaffolding, including almost daily teacher-led discussions. During my time in Daniel's class, the class primarily read and discussed *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

II. Sara

Sara never made me feel like I was imposing on her time. Whereas it was difficult to pin down the other teachers for a half-hour interview (which, as a former teacher, I totally understand and felt no resentment towards), I got the feeling that Sara would have happily spoken with me for a half hour every day if I had requested it. For her, participating in my study was as much about what she could learn from me as it was about what I could learn from her. She treated the interviews like conversations with a respected colleague, an opportunity to share ideas and insights. This is emblematic of the kind of professional she is—she takes an active approach to professional development, keeping up with the trade journals, reflecting on her practice, and experimenting with new approaches. Even though she is well into the second decade of her career, she was very modest about her expertise and repeatedly emphasized how much room she still has for growth. When I asked her how she learned to lead discussions, she responded:

> Oh, you mean like failing, having bad discussions, and saying this sucks? It's exhausting, right? I can tell it's not fun for students. They're not learning when I come up with these questions ahead of time or on the spot out of my head and I think that I'm being so brilliant by creating a discussion on the fly and the same two people are participating. It doesn't work. So I learned from that.

Interestingly, much of Sara's approach to leading discussions is informed by her identification as an introvert or a quiet person. She twice-referenced a book called *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* in which the author, Susan Cain, writes about how introverts, in Sara's words, "tend to process their thoughts and collect them before they speak and not just speak off-the-cuff." She spoke about her own experiences in staff meetings and how she can be silenced by her more extroverted colleagues and how that used to wear on her self-confidence: "…in those meetings, when I'm not participating, I used to think, shoot, am I the stupidest person here? How come I can never talk? How come they got the answer first?" Many of Sara's pedagogical choices around discussion—e.g., a commitment to small group discussions, not giving grades for discussions, etc.—can be traced back to her desire to create a space that does not overvalue the talkative student.

The Context

Sara teaches at a "middle college," which is a school model that allows students to earn their high school diploma while also earning college credits (up to three semesters' worth). As a charter school, it admits students through a lottery system. Like most middle colleges, Sara's school is located on a community college campus where students take a mixture of regular high school classes (in which their classmates are other high school students) and community college classes (in which their classmates are a mixture of high school and college students). Teaching at this school was a little different from teaching at a traditional high school. For one, teachers move around and teach in different classrooms. Secondly, the school operates on a community college schedule, which means classes are only a semester long. When I observed Sara's class

starting in January, it was the beginning of a new semester. This presented some potentially confounding variation in the sense that the month-long "snapshot" that I got of Sara's class was at the beginning of the academic unit as opposed to the middle. However, it also afforded me the opportunity to see a teacher do some of the norm-setting and culture-building that I hypothesized was important to leading discussions.

Sara's class was the smallest of the classes that I observed—21 students (71% White, 14% African-American, 10% Arab-American, 5% Asian-American, and evenly split between males and females). It was a remediation writing class for 10th graders and, therefore, was composed entirely of students who had been identified as struggling writers. The students were mandated to take this class instead of taking a college class of their own choosing. As someone who has been assigned to teach remediation classes before, I was surprised not to hear any of the students express displeasure at being placed in the class, though it's possible that they did not express it publicly or, at the very least, within earshot of me. They were, by and large, a positive and hard-working group. It's important to note that these were all students who chose—or whose parents/guardians chose—an alternative model of education. Some had been homeschooled up to this point and this was their first experience in a more traditional school setting. It was an environment where it was okay to be a little different, to challenge norms around gender, dress, values, etc. Students who might have been the target of bullying in a more traditional school seemed to be welcomed here.

Discussions in Sara's Class

The centerpiece of Sara's class is the writing workshop, a small-group discussion in which students give feedback on one another's writing. These workshops are heavily

scaffolded with students following a detailed protocol for what kind of feedback to give and when to give it. In addition to the workshops, she incorporates a great deal of small-group discussion into her daily lesson plans. Like the workshops, these small-group discussions follow a protocol, ranging from "Go in a circle and share your thoughts on X" to more complex formats. Sometimes this small-group work is followed by a whole-class discussion. During my time in Sara's class, the class read the short stories "Letter to God" by Gregorio Lopez Y Fuentes and "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid.

III. Kevin

Within the first few minutes of my first day in Kevin's class, Kevin notices a student who is fanning himself in an exaggerated (and distracting) manner. "What, are you mad hot?" he asks. The student responds, "I came from gym." Kevin fires back, "Were you getting dunked on?" The rest of the class laughs. This was my introduction to Kevin, and an apt one. He is playful, preferring to gently rib his students than to directly address behavior he would prefer they stopped, as in the above example. He speaks in language that is student friendly and slang-filled –e.g., "mad hot"—and manages, for a 40-something-year-old, to do so in a way that does not come off as overly contrived. You get the feeling that's just how he talks, and not that he's talking that way to earn points, even if that's sometimes the result. The walls of his room are covered with posters and art that represent the different aspects of his identity: poet, jock, social justice advocate. His dress is casual, and that's probably understating it. His typical uniform is hoodie, baggy khaki pants, and sneakers. I wrote in my field notes: "He dresses like he's out doing errands on a Saturday."

The Context

Kevin teaches at a large, comprehensive public school. Walking up the stairs to Kevin's class was a bit harrowing, as the flow of traffic was usually going the other direction and I felt like a salmon fighting its way upstream, trying to avoid getting shouldered into the railing. This was a big school that felt like a big school. Maybe it was the massive student parking lot filled with students' cars (a sign of the community's relative affluence). Or maybe it was just the labyrinthine campus with its sprawling athletic grounds. At any rate, it lacked the intimacy of Daniel's and Sara's respective schools. Kevin confirmed for me that many of his students did not know each other by name at the beginning of the semester.

Kevin's class (68% White, 20% African-American, 9% Asian-American, 3% Hispanic) was a "general ed" class, which means it was composed of students who either were not considered proficient enough readers and/or writers for the Honors class or who declined the Honors track. It was very boy-heavy, 28 boys to 6 girls. This was something that Kevin described as a challenge the first time we spoke. All the boy energy, he said, made for a particularly rambunctious group, a description that resonated with what I observed. Socially, the group seemed pretty divided, and since students could sit wherever they wanted, those divisions were geographical. Though I rarely saw any open animosity, there was not a lot of movement across groups.

Discussions in Kevin's Class

There was rarely any clear demarcation between not-discussion and discussion in Kevin's class. Though Kevin did make time for discussion in his class, it was just as likely—if not more likely—that a discussion would arise unplanned. These discussions

were not always directly related to the text. Kevin explained to me that this was by design:

> …I think that helps us create the environment where everyone feels free to have opinions and allows their voice to be part of the class, but also just because, you know, I think it's a long period, 56 minutes. I think it's good to kind of, like, get the class started by just talking about whatever is on their minds in a way, going back and forth about things. (Kevin, Preliminary Interview)

These kinds of informal discussions didn't happen every day, only if something caught. But they happened enough to be a signature of Kevin's pedagogy. Text-based discussions happened too, but had a similarly informal quality. He often used reading quizzes as a launch into text-based discussions. During my time in Kevin's class, the class primarily read and discussed *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding.

IV. Kathleen

The first thing you notice about Kathleen is her warmth. This is evident from the minute students walk into the room—she is at the door, greeting them, making conversation—and extends to the treatment of their ideas and feelings. Fundamental to her teaching style is a deep belief in the importance of relationships. When I visited Kathleen's class in April, I got the overwhelming feeling that her students liked her and trusted her. This trust allows her to be tough when she needs to be, without getting too much pushback. Her expectations for student behavior are high and she does not hesitate to confront a student who is not meeting those expectations or to publicly chastise students for, say, not doing the reading. There is an edge to her warmth (and a warmth to her edge).

The Context

Kathleen's school is a medium-sized comprehensive public school. Bordering a large city with a notoriously underfunded school system, the district is populated by a great number of students whose families either moved out of the city in search of "better" schools or who remain in the city but attend through school of choice or acceptance into one of the district's honors programs. One notable characteristic of the school (and district) is that though it primarily serves African-American students, the infrastructure—that is, the people who run the school—is almost completely White. Most of the teachers, including Kathleen, are White. I attended a football game and noted that the head coach was White, the director of the marching band was White, even the P.A. announcers were White. It presented a strange contrast with the players and the majority of people in the crowd.

Kathleen's class (88% African-American, 12% White) is a "general ed" 9th grade class. Of the 26 students, only six were girls; however, the disparity between male and female voices was not as great in this class compared to Kevin's, perhaps because the six girls made up a greater proportion of the whole, or perhaps because the teacher's voice was a female voice. As members of the "Freshman Academy," 9th graders take all of the their core classes together in a wing of the building dedicated to the academy. Relatedly, academy teachers have significant opportunities to collaborate, including across disciplines. Here Kathleen describes some of the academic benefits of the academy structure:

> It's a very close community down here. The kids know each other very well. I think that lends itself to being able to open up more in a classroom. It's a small

school, 250 kids in our freshman academy, so I think you're more willing to open up to people you know than to strangers. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

Discussions in Kathleen's class

Kathleen often used discussion as a way to prime students' brains before getting into the day's work. For example, to prepare them to read a section from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in which Maya Angelou describes attending a funeral, Kathleen asks students questions like, "What do you think about at a funeral?" After reading the passage together, Kathleen initiates more discussion by asking, "Is your death predetermined? Is your fate set?" When these kinds of text-to-self questions are successful, like on this day, you can hear the room buzz with students' initial responses. Sometimes these discussions shifted nicely into more text-based discussions; other times they remained on a more personal level.

Table 3.1

Participant context and classroom features

Name	Context	Classroom Features (at Time of Data Collection)
Daniel	IB school; charter; QARE system used in all English classes (Question, Answer, Rebut, Extend)	"graded discussions"; *The Great Gatsby*
Sara	middle college; charter; remediation writing class	writing workshops; small-group discussion; "Letter to God," "Girl"
Kevin	comprehensive public school; "general ed" class; 28 boys and 6 girls	spontaneous discussion about topics not directly related to the texts; quizzes as a launch into text-based discussion; *Lord of the Flies*
Kathleen	comprehensive public school; "general ed" class; predominantly African-American	discussion as pre- and post-reading activity; text-to-self; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Student Focus Group Participants

In addition to interviewing and observing the teachers, I conducted student focus groups. The number of students who participated in each focus group ranged from three to eleven; my intention was to speak with 3-4 students, but I did not turn students down if

they volunteered. I also invited specific students to participate, using race, gender, and discussion participation as selection criteria. Specifically, I sought to form groups that a) represented the racial diversity of the class, b) were evenly split by gender, and c) represented students who participated robustly in classroom discussions and students who did not.

Data Sources and Collection

I collected data from November 2015 to May 2016. I spent a month in each teacher's classroom, taking field notes and collecting video records. In total, I conducted 58 observations and collected 37 video records ranging in length from 45 to 90 minutes. In addition, I formally interviewed each teacher between two and four times. In total, I conducted eleven interviews ranging in length from 45 to 90 minutes. I also conducted three student focus groups ranging in length from 15 to 40 minutes.[11]

Semi-Structured Preliminary Interviews

Before observing the teachers doing the work of planning and leading discussions, I wanted to get a sense of how they define discussion, including how they conceptualize the role of the teacher and students in a discussion, and what they count as evidence of a good discussion. More generally, I used the preliminary interviews as an opportunity to build some context for what I saw in the observations. I also asked the teachers to describe how they developed their particular approach to leading discussions, and what, in their experience, have been the most significant barriers and supports, respectively, to leading good discussions. Discussions happen in the context of schools and cultures, and this final set of questions aimed to place the teachers' practices in broader institutional

[11] Unfortunately, Kevin did not respond to my request to arrange a time and space for the student focus group. I don't think this was because he did not want me to speak with his students, but because he just got too busy.

and cultural contexts. The semi-structured design allowed me to ask follow-up questions or pursue ideas as they emerged (Weiss, 1994), which proved essential for filling out the picture of the teachers' beliefs and practices that I was beginning to form. For the preliminary interview protocol, see Appendix A.

Videotaped Observation and Field Notes

I spent approximately a month in each teacher's classroom, taking detailed field notes and collecting video records of the teachers' classes. I did not just record the teachers' discussions; I turned the camera on at the beginning of class and turned it off at the end. I chose a month because anything less than a month did not seem long enough to place a teacher's discussion-related practice in its larger sociocultural and instructional contexts, and anything more than a month would have made it logistically difficult to observe four teachers. Moreover, I already felt like I was asking a lot of teachers.

I typically did not start recording until the second week because I wanted the students to feel comfortable with my presence before I brought a camera into the room. The camera I used was relatively inconspicuous. I cannot say for certain that the students forgot about the camera completely, but I can say that none of the students interacted with the camera or treated it like a novelty. In addition to the video record, I wrote field notes for each observation, taking special care to note those details that might not show up clearly or at all in the video (e.g., the student just outside the frame with her hand up not getting called on). I wrote these by hand so as to be less of a distraction, and typed them up later at home.

Making a decision about *when* to conduct my observations was complicated. Initially, I thought it would be good to observe teachers during the first month of school

so I could observe them as they established norms and routines that supported discussion. However, most schools and/or school districts do not allow researchers during the first month of school because, understandably, they don't want any distractions (for teachers or for students) during those first critical weeks. There was certainly an argument to be made for observing all four teachers during the exact same time of the school year—that way I could be reasonably certain that variation in the teachers' practices was not just a product of the timing in the school year. Logistically, however, there was no way I could have observed more than two classes per day, unless I recruited four teachers from the same school. Perhaps I could have used an alternate day schedule, but then I might have missed critical data by not ever observing the same class two days in a row. I also could have decreased the number of teachers in my study, but it was already a small sample, and shrinking it further would have left it even more vulnerable to outliers. Ultimately, I decided to risk some potentially confounding variation by observing the teachers at different times of the school year. I tried to limit this variation by staying away from the beginning and ending months of the school year (although Sara's situation confounded this effort). There was also an argument to be made for timing my visits to see an entire unit, but some units are shorter than a month and some are longer. And since finding teachers (and getting into schools) proved to be more challenging than I anticipated, I did not have the freedom of waiting until the next unit started.

Stimulated Recall Interviews

I conducted at least one stimulated recall interviews with each participating teacher (7 total). I used the video footage of the teachers' discussions to stimulate their thinking and talking about the moves that they made during the discussions. Whereas the

observations allowed me to see what teachers did during discussions, the stimulated recall interviews allowed me to probe why they did those things (Calderhead, 1981; Housner & Griffey, 1985). I conducted these interviews as close to the corresponding observation as possible; that way, everything was still fresh in the teacher's memory. Stimulated recall has its limitations certainly. For one, it is possible that the teachers "sanitized" their accounts of their thinking in order to hide something that was personally embarrassing or to confirm what they perceived my goals or hypotheses to be (Lyle, 2003). One of my goals throughout this process was to build trust with the teachers, so they did not perceive me as someone who was evaluating their practice, but as a colleague who was trying to learn from their practice (which I made clear included their struggles and their successes). I also tried not to reveal my own personal ideas and opinions about what good discussions look like or what is good discussion practice.

Before these interviews, I identified segments of video that I deemed to be sufficiently rich sites of analysis. In some cases, I looked for excerpts from discussions that seemed representative. In other cases, I identified places where the teachers were particularly active as facilitators. In addition to prompting the teachers to note those moments in the discussion that they deemed most notable or critical, I interrogated moments or moves that I had questions about. I hoped that these interviews would look more like conversations, but was only partially successful in this respect. Two of the teachers stopped the video repeatedly to share an observation about their teaching or something that a student said or did; the other two were more likely to wait for me to stop the video and ask the questions that I came in prepared to ask. For sample stimulated recall questions, see Appendix B.

Semi-Structured Student Focus Groups

I conducted one student focus group per teacher (minus Kevin). The purpose of the student focus groups was to check my developing understanding of the teachers' practices against the students' experiences of those practices. I was careful to frame my questions so it did not seem like I was asking them to make value judgments about their teachers. For example, instead of asking, "Did Daniel do anything that got in the way of good discussions?" I asked, "Were there any obstacles to having good discussions in Daniel's class?" In addition to asking the students about their thoughts on specific practices I observed, I asked them to describe their discussion-related preferences more broadly. For the most part, the students were excited to talk with me and did not require much drawing out. As with the preliminary interviews, the semi-structured nature allowed me to take up the students' ideas and preoccupations as they emerged. Interestingly, these focus groups had a meta quality in the sense that they became like mini-discussions themselves. For focus group protocol, see Appendix C.

Instructional Artifacts

Finally, I collected instructional artifacts along the way in order to triangulate what I learned from the interviews and the observations. Examples of artifacts included handouts, student work, and photographs of the board. In addition to contributing to the composite, the artifacts filled in places where my memory could not be expected to be perfect or where my field notes were incomplete.

Data Coding and Analysis

I employed constant comparative analysis (CCA) (Strauss, 1987) to analyze the data. I selected CCA because it provides a rigorous yet nimble structure within which to

record my observations and, ultimately, to develop my interpretations of those observations. At the heart of this structure was an iterative cycle of collecting data, writing field notes, and, eventually, writing theoretical memos. By continuously writing about what I saw—in both the descriptive mode of the field note and the analytical mode of the theoretical memo—I surfaced features of leading discussions that were present across the participating teachers. I also continuously referred to the matrix of instructional purposes and the criteria for a "good" discussion that I introduced in Chapter Two. These tools facilitated a multidimensional analysis of the discussions I observed, situating the teachers' actions in their specific instructional context (i.e., the teacher's goals for the discussion or that part of the discussion) and holding them up against a small set of commonly agreed-upon features of a good discussion. Although it is conventional to claim that patterns "emerged" from the data, there were some patterns that I expected to see. For example, I would have been surprised not to see teachers asking students to clarify their thinking. I include this because it was important to be clear about what findings I was primed to identify—by the literature, by my own experience, etc.—and what findings represented something truly emergent. On the other hand, being primed to notice something like "teachers asking students to clarify their thinking" did not preclude unexpected patterns from emerging within that practice.

My preliminary theoretical memos attempted to develop conceptual codes from empirical indicators in the data. I had not begun transcribing the interviews yet, but the teachers' words were certainly in my head as I developed these codes. One of my purposes during this initial phase of coding was simply to locate the work of leading discussions amidst everything else that I might pay attention to. To put it in question

form, what is included in the work of leading discussions? The answer to that question became my earliest set of conceptual codes. I tried to remain as open-minded as possible at this point, drawing primarily on the data, but also on the literature and my own experiential understandings about the work of leading discussions. To that end, I treated this phase of coding as a kind of brainstorm (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), erring on the side of comprehensiveness over analytical precision.

With this initial set of codes as a guide, I also began trying out different ways to visually represent the work of leading discussions, one purpose of which was to begin clarifying some of the relationships among codes. I include three of those figures below to give the reader a sense of my thinking. I won't go into detail about these figures here except to say that each figure represents a different vantage point or perspective on the work of leading discussions.

Figure 3.1

Visual representation of discussion A

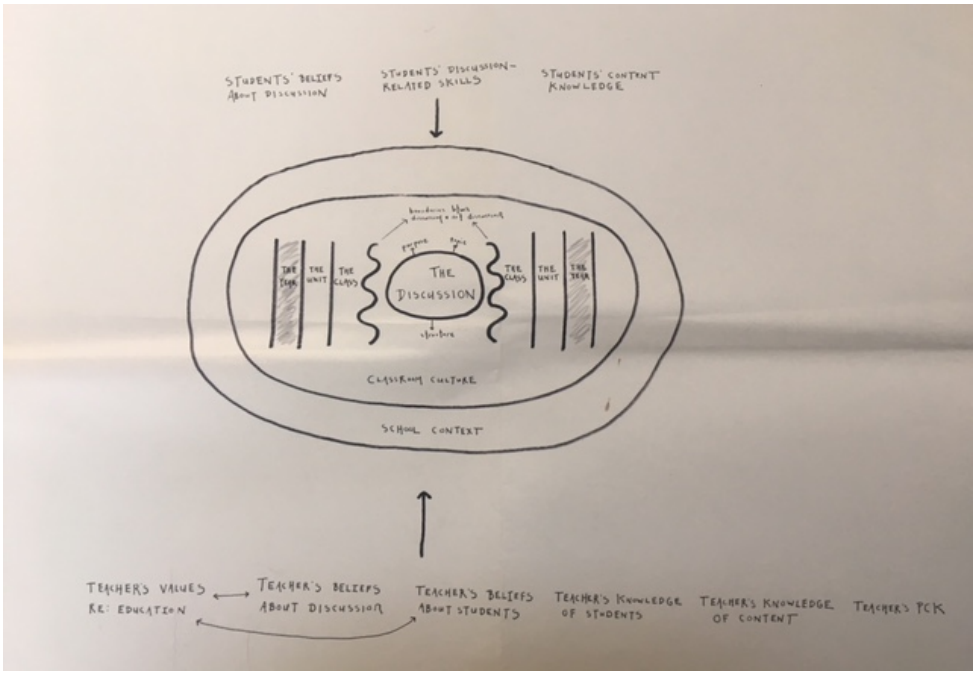


Figure 3.2

Visual representation of discussion B

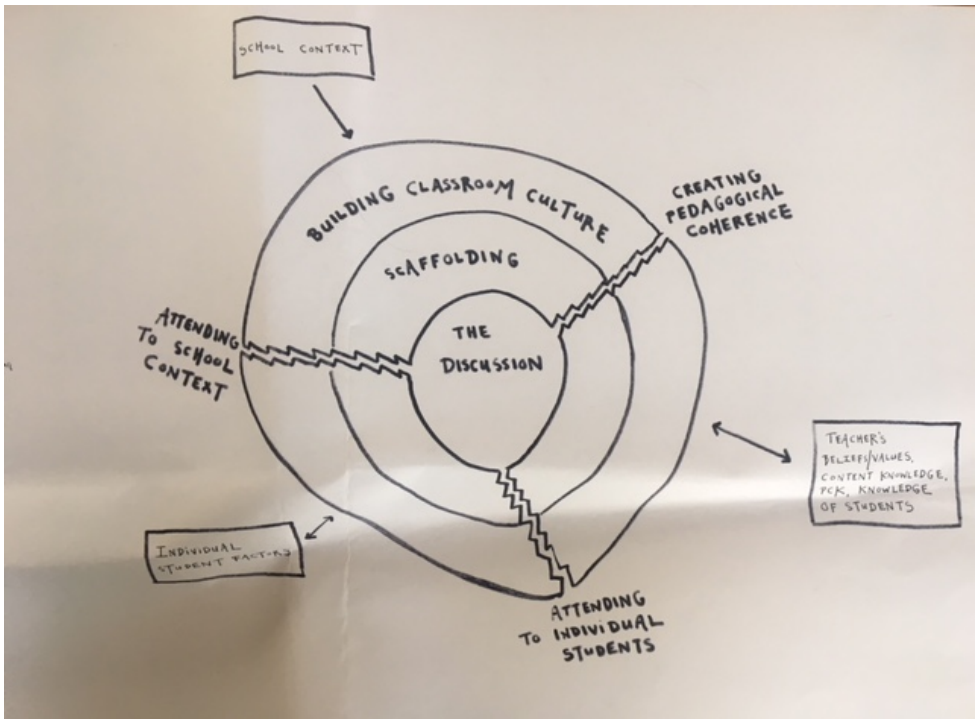
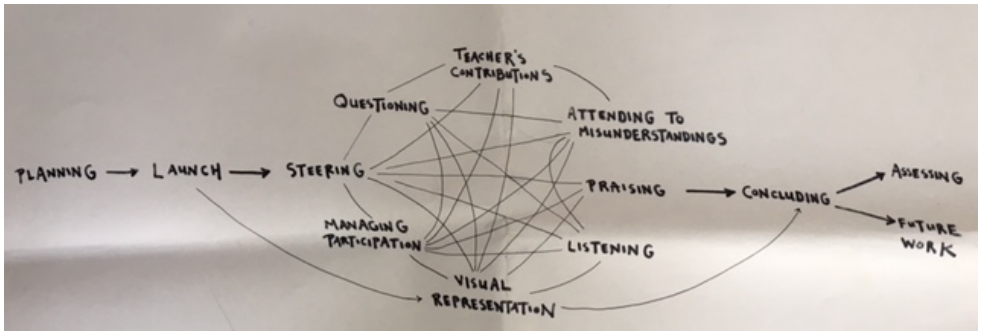


Figure 3.3

Visual representation of discussion C



The next phase of coding and analysis began once I started transcribing the interviews and a selection of classroom discussions. The transcription process itself was a generative one for me, and I often stopped midway through to memo on an idea that

occurred to me while transcribing. Going back and forth between the data and my memos, I refined my coding paradigm and settled on a set of coded categories that captured what I saw in the data. These codes were a product of constant comparison—comparison across teachers and comparison across indicators. My guiding question shifted from, "What is included in the work of leading discussions?" to "What do these teachers do to lead discussions?" Although I retained some codes that were more a product of the former question—e.g., "the teachers' beliefs"—I also set aside codes that I just didn't see enough evidence for in the data—e.g., "synthesizing students' comments." It was at this point that I undertook a line-by-line coding of the transcribed data.

From here, I shifted to axial coding, "dimensionalizing" categories and analyzing the relationships among categories (Strauss, 1987). By "dimensionalizing," I mean that I parsed categories into their various subcategories. So, for example, "respect for students" became "respect for students' personhood" and "respect for students' intelligence." By analyzing the relationships among categories, I mean that I sought to better understand how the categories related to one another, particularly with respect to leading discussions. How, for example, might a facilitation practice like "building on student ideas" be related to the teachers' "respect for student's intelligence"? This was deeply iterative work, as I moved back and forth between the codes and the data, memoing throughout. I elevated some concepts or themes as umbrella codes and subsumed minor codes underneath the umbrella codes, ultimately arriving at a set of "core" categories.

It is these "core" categories that gave direction to the final "selective coding" stage of my analysis. I constructed a chart of codes of what the teachers did to lead good discussions, providing a date exemplar for each code. See Tables 3.2-3.4 for coding

categories and data exemplars. I considered how the data exemplars supported each code, and, in some cases, I decided to collapse or eliminate codes. In essence, I attempted to relate as many codes as possible to the core categories. This was, in the language of Strauss (1987), theory building by way of integration. I continued to write theoretical memos to develop my thinking. As a map or record of that thinking, this accumulated body of writing exists as an audit trail that might be used later—by me or by others—to retrace my steps (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 3.2

Coding categories and data exemplars: Respect for students

Code	Operational Definition	Data Exemplar
Respect for students' personhood	The teacher expresses or demonstrates respect for who students are as people, including their emotional lives.	"At the end of class, the student who had his head down is the last to leave. Not sure if Daniel called him over or if the student approach him of his own accord. Daniel urges him, 'Get more sleep.'" (Daniel, Field Notes)
Respect for students' intelligence	The teacher expresses or demonstrates respect for students' intellectual contributions.	"My goal is to respect their thoughts and model that in front of the other students so they know that I will never reject their thought process." (Kathleen, Stimulated Recall)

Table 3.3

Coding categories and data exemplars: Sharing authority

Code	Operational Definition	Data Exemplar
Intellectual authority	The teacher takes action to decenter his/her own intellectual contributions and/or to center students' intellectual contributions.	"I want [students] to be able to make decisions about their writing based on feedback and that means choosing what to adopt and what to change and what not to change." (Sara, Stimulated Recall)
Physical authority	The teacher does not rigidly control students' bodies or voices.	"I get offended by the idea that students have to ask me if they have to go to the washroom." (Kevin, Stimulated Recall)

Table 3.4

Coding categories and data exemplars: The teachers' practices

Code	Operational Definition	Data Exemplar
Making discussion commonplace	The teacher makes discussion an ordinary occurrence.	"I want them to know we can discuss things at any point of the lesson at any day, as opposed to, that we have to, like, get into a special, you know, discussion circle or anything like that." (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)
Integrating discussion into the curriculum	The teacher actively connects discussion with other activities and goals.	I use discussion to pause the lesson and to let students do some talking and listening about a key concept or something that's related that they bring from their experience. So I use it as a sort of a pacing feature in my lesson. I use it as a debrief. (Sara, Preliminary Discussion)
Scaffolding content knowledge	The teacher supports students in building the content knowledge they will need to participate in discussions, and selects discussion topics accordingly.	"I want to make sure that everybody can participate regardless of whether they actually did the work the night before. I know there's a lot of teachers who would probably disagree with that kind of philosophy." (Kevin, Preliminary Interview)
Scaffolding discussion skills	The teacher supports students in participating in discussions by explicitly teaching them *how* to participate productively.	"Sara gives lots of information about the workshop format, structure/norms/sentence starter examples. She hands out a guide that breaks down the kinds of responses that students can make into four types of responses." (Sara, Field Notes)
Planning the discussion	The teacher enters class with a plan for the day's discussion(s).	"Today's lesson is a reading of Ch. 26 in *Caged Bird*. Kathleen has a set of pre- and post-reading questions prepared that she projects on the board. Students are supposed to follow along on a handout." (Kathleen, Field Notes)
Initiating the discussion	The teacher begins a	"Why is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* a fitting title for Maya's memoir?"

	discussion by inviting students into a disciplinary investigation.	(Kathleen, 5/17)
Facilitation practices that draw out students	The teacher enacts practices during discussions that support student in formulating and articulating their ideas.	**Kevin:** Piggy felt betrayed by Ralph because Ralph told everyone to call him Piggy, right? Is this a big deal? **Student 1:** Only for piggy. **Kevin:** Only for piggy? Why do you say that? (Kevin, 3/29)
Facilitation practices that orient students to one another	The teacher enacts practices during discussions that support students in listening and responding to one another.	**Sara:** What would the story sound like if the title was "Boy"? **Student 1:** It would have been shorter. **Sara:** It would have been short. What would be in the list? (Sara, 4/11)
Facilitation practices that build on student thinking	The teacher enacts practices that extend or complicate student-generated ideas.	"I was not intending to bring up that particular question that day, but with her kind of bringing up this allegory, that connects me with this other allegory I've really been beating over their heads about the light..." (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)
"Monologic" discursive turns	The teacher makes a contribution that might be perceived as monologic (i.e., teacher-centered, closed-ended, authoritative).	**Kevin:** But Piggy is the name of what? **Multiple students:** A pig. **Kevin:** A pig, right? Like an animal. **Student 1:** That's so rude. **Kevin:** So in a very literal way, this young boy with glasses who's overweight with asthma is no longer being called the name of a human. He's being called the name of an animal. What's the term for that, when you call someone a name that isn't human? **Student 2:** Dehumanizing. (Kevin, 3/29)
Concluding the discussion	The teacher closes the discussion in a way that connects the discussion to other parts of the class.	"Allegory! Guys, when you can identify allegories like that, you are right next to author's purpose, alright? When you can find an allegory like that and describe it, as Scarlett did very well, you're right there at author's purpose." (Daniel, 12/3)

Managing Risks to Participants

I did not anticipate that this study would pose great risk to any of the participants. The teachers were under no pressure to agree to participate in the study. The students who participated in the focus group may have felt pressure from their teachers, but I tried to minimize this possibility by stating verbally and in writing that their participation was completely voluntary. A month is a long time to spend in a teacher's classroom, and the presence of an outside researcher can be an unwelcome distraction. To alleviate this potential for distraction, I made every effort to blend in with the classes I observed. I made sure to arrive before the bell rang so I didn't interrupt class with my entrance. I took notes by hand. I also communicated with the teachers that I did not want them to diverge in any way from whatever they were planning to do before I entered the equation. Thus, I don't think the students had a dramatically altered educational experience with me in the room, although it is impossible for me to say this for certain. Finally, I was explicit throughout the process that participants could drop out of the study at any time.

One possible risk was a breach of confidentiality. This was of the utmost concern since the teachers' employment and reputation in the community could be negatively affected by being associated with an unflattering finding. I took steps to avoid this risk. None of the audio included identifying information. When transcribing the audio files, I removed all identifying information in the transcripts and assigned pseudonyms to the participants. I did the same with student focus group transcripts. The video records, of course, could not be altered or produced in such a way as to remove all identifying information. The teachers and students signed consent forms granting me permission to use this footage at, say, a conference. However, if I choose to do so, I will make sure that attendees refrain from recording my presentation. In order to securely store the data, I

kept all data in a locked file cabinet, which is where it will remain until I delete or destroy it completely.

Limitations

This study was exploratory in nature. There were only four participants. They represented a fairly narrow swath of the secondary (6-12) grade band. They also represented a necessarily limited range of possible secondary ELA contexts. It is quite possible that discussions look dramatically different in a classroom of, say, English Language Learners. Relatedly, the study did not position me to draw any conclusions about the extent to which students' cultural and racial backgrounds affect what a good discussion looks like. Does, for example, discussion look different in classrooms that are predominantly Black, predominantly Asian-American, predominantly Latinx, etc.? With the exception of Kathleen's class, white students held a majority in the classes that I observed. And since the teachers were also White, I suspect that the dominant dialogic practices in those rooms were more likely to be influenced by White dialogic values. Moreover, since all four teachers were White, I did not learn anything about the kinds of resources that teachers from different cultural (and, thus, discursive) backgrounds might bring to discussion. These are real shortcomings, and suggest important directions for subsequent research.

Coincidentally, the lexile levels of the texts the students were discussing in the four classrooms were remarkably similar (ranging from 770 to 1010). It may be that the teachers' practices would have been different if they had been discussing easier or harder texts. (Of course, what is "easy" and what is "hard" also depends on the students.) I'm also curious to learn how teachers manage discussions that enter into more controversial

territory. I only observed one discussion that would fall into that category, and so I can't say how teachers manage that very difficult work.

Lastly, the focus of this study is the teachers' discussion-related practices and not the students' responses to those practices. My analysis does not omit student behavior but it is primarily focused on the teachers. This limits the applicability of my findings in the sense that I can draw no empirically-based connections between the teachers' practices and the students' behavior during discussions. In other words, maybe a student participated in a discussion because of, say, the teacher's skillful scaffolding of content knowledge, but maybe not. The student focus groups permitted me an opportunity to superficially probe the students' experiences of discussion in their respective classrooms, but because I spoke to so few students overall, I cannot extend what those students said to their classmates let alone to secondary students more generally. In sum, the results of this study should not be taken as representative of the broader populations of ELA teachers or contexts of schooling. They are, at best, suggestive.

One final possible limitation: there is the possibility that my presence in the classroom affected how the participating teachers and their students behaved. To minimize the possibility that the teachers behaved differently than they normally would have, I emphasized that it was not my goal to see a "perfect" discussion and that I anticipated learning more from seeing teachers respond when the discussion did not go perfectly. To this end, I was clear in my communication with them that there was as much to learn from their missteps as from their successes. Knowing that they had the opportunity to explain their actions in the stimulated recall interview may also have alleviated some of the pressure they felt to lead an unimpeachably good discussion. These

were all veteran teachers who were quite comfortable in their own skin, so to speak, and I did not get the feeling that they were putting on a performance for me. To minimize the possibility that the students behaved differently, I explained to them that I was studying their teacher and not them. I also tried to build rapport with them in the minutes before the bell rang or during classroom activities, although I didn't force this. In addition, I took measures to be as unobtrusive as possible during the observations (as described above).

Role of the researcher

I've been an English teacher for 15 years and discussion is a practice that is near and dear to my heart (as a teacher and as a student). It would be foolhardy not to acknowledge that I entered this study with relatively strong opinions about what is good practice and what is bad practice. In addition, I've also spent the last four years working on a team tasked with developing a performance assessment to evaluate novice teachers' ability to lead discussions. Which is all to say, I've been thinking a lot about discussion and this thinking almost certainly came to bear on my interpretations in ways both conscious and unconscious. I regard my insiderness as both an asset and a liability. As an insider to classroom practice (though not to the specific classrooms that I visited), I had an intuitive sense of what to pay attention to. However, it also possible that my expectations for a teacher's behavior in a discussion biased my interpretation of that behavior, or blinded me to unexpected behaviors that may have also had a significant influence on the course of a discussion. This would make my findings susceptible to the critique that they were determined by my own preconceived ideas about what I should find and not what was actually in the data.

I attempted to counter this danger with a heavy reliance on the testimonies of the participating teachers. In other words, I was careful to test my interpretations of their teaching against their own interpretations. I conducted member checks during the interviews and during more informal conversations that happened throughout. At the end of each interview, I asked, "Is there anything I should have asked you, but didn't?" I also brought a large amount of humility to the work. Though I've spent a great deal of time developing my own ability to lead discussions, I'm not an expert. I was in part so amazed by Ms. Z's teaching because it looked so different from my own. I embarked on this study with a genuine desire to learn from other skilled teachers.

CHAPTER IV: TEACHERS' RESPECT FOR STUDENTS

Overview of Major and Supporting Assertions

Based on an analysis and interpretation of data collected in this study, I posit the following major assertion about what the participating teachers do when they're trying to lead good discussions: Leading discussions rests on the sustained enactment of broadly dialogic teaching practices that advance and are founded upon respectful relationships with students. Though the teachers differed in the specific practices they enacted, they were united by an orientation towards students that was deeply affirming of students' intelligence and personhood, and an underlying ambition to share authority with students. Sometimes the teachers acted in ways that appeared monologic—and, thus, at odds with their orientations—but that a closer look revealed to be in keeping with their dialogic goals.

Three sub-assertions support this major assertion (see Figure 1). The first focuses on the teachers' orientations towards students, the second on the teachers' positioning of the students with respect to authority, and the third on the teachers' practices. In the following paragraphs, I provide brief elaborations of the sub-assertions.

The first sub-assertion elaborates on the nature of the teachers' respect for students: The participating teachers described and enacted orientations towards students and learning distinguished by a deep respect for students' intelligence and personhood. When talking about "respect for students," there is a danger of sounding trite; it would be hard to find a teacher currently employed who would not say, yes, of course they respect

their students. But there is also much to suggest—in the literature, in some influential, contemporary approaches to training teachers, in predominant teaching practices—that genuine respect for students remains a rarity in practice. As I will illustrate in this chapter, each of the participating teachers founds their pedagogy on a bedrock of respect for students' ideas, feelings, and day-to-day concerns. How the teachers communicate that respect varies from teacher to teacher, but it remains true that across the four teachers, I observed a common commitment to treating students respectfully.

The second sub-assertion elaborates on the teachers' positioning of the students with respect to authority: The teachers were characterized by a radical ambition to share authority with students. This included both intellectual authority—who possesses valued knowledge—and physical authority—who makes and enforces the rules. I call it "radical" because it is in such sharp contrast with the dominant model of education in which the teacher holds the power and students are expected to follow along (though, of course, in reality, the dynamics of power in a classroom rarely unfold in so one-sided a way). In Chapter 5, I describe the ways in which the teachers intentionally acted to share the balance of power in the classroom so that students looked to each other or to themselves for a particular lesson's most valuable contribution. Since this is essentially countercultural work, in the sense that it breaks from dominant cultural notions about the respective roles of teacher and student, the teachers had to develop specific strategies tailored to that end. Yet, they did not abdicate their authority completely. To the contrary, they activated their authority in moments when they deemed it professionally necessary, providing active and ongoing support of the dialogic space.

The third sub-assertion elaborates on the teachers' practices: The teachers enacted teaching moves *around* and *during* discussions that were intended to buttress students' abilities to participate effectively and increase the likelihood of a rich discussion. The practices formed a pedagogically coherent tapestry that supported students' capacities for text-based discussion. Additionally, the discussions involved considerable teacher-generated discourse as the teachers negotiated between their dialogic goals and specific learning goals. In Chapter 6, I describe the teachers' practices in detail and give special attention to the influence of learning goals on the teachers' enactment of discussion. On the surface, the amount of teacher talk suggested a possible contradiction between the teachers' stated commitments to dialogism and their practices; however, I argue that not all teacher talk is monologic, particularly when that talking is responsive to the larger instructional context.

Before turning to the data presentation, it is important to linger for a moment on an inherent pitfall in the construction of grounded theory (Strauss, 1987). The purpose of this study was to understand what secondary ELA teachers do when they are trying to lead good discussions. In my findings, I present both what I heard teachers say about their practice and what I saw them do. In doing so, I attempt to portray the teachers' words and actions as faithfully as possible without allowing my own predetermined beliefs about discussion practice to contaminate the data. But this is a fraught enterprise. What I see and don't see is just as given to subjective bias as my evaluations of what I see. For that reason, I have tried to use the teachers' own words about their practice to guide my seeing, in addition to what my own practice and research has prepared me to see. I am, after all, an outsider to their classrooms and am at risk of drawing value-based

conclusions without seeing or understanding key pieces of the puzzle. By explicitly acknowledging both the limitations of my knowledge and my assumptions about teaching and learning, I hope to assuage somewhat the reader's concerns about how my subjective biases may have predetermined my findings.

Sub-Assertion One: Respect for Students

The major assertion of this dissertation hints at mutually reinforcing relationship between the teachers' practices and their orientations; the practices are animated by the teachers' respect for students and, when enacted skillfully, deepen that respect further. Since it is possible that one might expect a study like this to produce something that resembles a checklist (e.g., "5 Steps to Improve Your Discussions"), it is important to disabuse the readers of that expectation from the beginning. Although I will report on discrete and actionable teaching moves that the teachers executed in Chapter 6, I argue that replicating these moves without infusing them with a deep and genuine respect for students would be a hollow and potentially self-defeating exercise. In this chapter, I employ the data to support the following sub-assertion: The participating teachers described and enacted orientations towards students and learning distinguished by a deep respect for students' intelligence and personhood.

I was not surprised to find that the participating teachers respected their students. I was surprised to see respect—and patterns of behavior that embodied and communicated that respect—emerge so emphatically from the data. In retrospect, maybe I should not have been so surprised. Without a view of students that perceives them as capable, astute thinkers, it is unlikely that teachers will act in ways that foster good discussions. The kinds of teacher moves that the participating teachers make—and that I describe in

Chapters 5 and 6—are simply incompatible with the belief, consciously or subconsciously held, that students are incapable of sophisticated thought, or, in a subtler and more common variation, the belief that students are less capable of sophisticated thought than the teacher. In fact, teachers who hold this kind of deficit view about their students' intellectual capabilities are likely to behave in ways that actively thwart discussion. If a teacher does not truly believe that his/her students have anything new or helpful or interesting to say about a text, why would he/she ask them, or if he/she does ask them, why would he/she listen to their responses?

Obvious as that may seem, the data suggests we must start here in trying to understand what goes into leading good discussions. Expecting a teacher who lacks respect for students to lead good discussions on a regular basis is a little like expecting to grow vegetables on the beach—the soil's all wrong. Moreover, what respect for students sounds like and looks like is less obvious, particularly the kind of respect that is supportive of leading good discussions. Most teachers, especially if pressed on it by an outsider to their classroom, are going to say they respect their students. You would be hard pressed to find a school district in 2018 that does not promote "respect" as one of its core values. That is why it is important to press down on this notion of respect. It is one thing for a teacher to claim that he/she respects their students; it is quite another for him/her to articulate that respect in specific and careful ways, and another still for him/her to act on it in ways that are not merely superficial, but that permeate his/her pedagogy. It is here where I hope this chapter can make a contribution—by sharpening the field's conceptualization of what it means for a teacher to respect his/her students, an

abstraction that is too often left underdefined, and by elaborating on its relationship to discussion-based pedagogy.

I divide this chapter into two parts. The first focuses on the teachers' respect for students' personhood, the second on their respect for students' intelligence. By personhood, I mean the whole student—their backgrounds, their feelings, their passions, their outside-of-school lives. By intelligence, I mean the students' capacity for sophisticated thinking. Though this chapter is primarily focused on the teachers' orientations—their beliefs and values—I also present instantiations of those orientations from their practice. This is necessary because, in teaching, actions often belie words. A teacher might talk about how he/she respects his/her students, but behave otherwise in their practice. For this reason, I corroborate the teachers' articulations with my observations of their practice.

"Beyond Just a Person in a Chair": Respect for students' personhood

One significant manifestation of the teachers' respect for students was their singular focus on relationship-building. At its heart, this is about finding a way to connect with students on a fundamentally human level. Here Kathleen describes her focus on relationships and explains why she thinks they are important:

> A lot of my pedagogy is just the relationships I build. I feel like when you have a relationship--not even just, like, you're a student in my classroom, but I know your name, I know what your family is like, I know what you do outside of school. I talk to you if you got your hair cut and let you know you look nice….And that type of relationship just makes them come into my room and just automatically want to be here and feel good about being here. They know I care

about them beyond just a person in a chair in my classroom. So then therefore they give me the same in return. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

A more conventional way of expressing the relationship between pedagogy and relationship building might be to say, "My pedagogy is supported by the relationships I build," or "My pedagogy requires that I build relationships." Kathleen, on the other hand, says that her pedagogy *is* the relationships she builds. By equating pedagogy with relationship building, she accomplishes a few things. First and foremost, she resists describing relationship building in purely utilitarian terms. Though we can't know if she does this consciously or unconsciously, it is in stark contrast to the way relationship building is often talked about in education, which is as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. The logic goes, if students feel connected to their teacher, they are more likely to comply with what the teacher asks. While I do not disagree with the basic premise—we are more likely to do something for a friend than we are for a stranger or for someone we actively dislike—there is also something inadequate about this way of thinking. It reduces the important work of relationship building to a secondary role, as if earning students' trust and building a classroom environment where students feel cared for were not important enough goals on their own. In this view, students are potentially recalcitrant subjects that must be manipulated—albeit with the best of intentions—to accomplish the teacher's goals. For Kathleen, relationship-building is not separable from her pedagogy or, for that matter, her academic goals. It *is* those things—not secondary to them, but of them.

Secondly, she avoids the binary that is often posed in education that puts pedagogical skills on one side and relational skills on the other. Sometimes this binary is

framed as hard skills and soft skills, a characterization that diminishes the importance of the "softer" relational skills, especially when interpreted from within the dominant patriarchal discourse that tends to value the masculine over the feminine. "Hard" carries connotations of a technical, specialized skill set (the masculine), whereas "soft" carries connotations of a skill set that is more emotional or intuitive by nature (the feminine). Kathleen insists that these are not two, but one, and that her ability to build relationships with students is as essential to her power as a teacher—and as technical—as her ability to, say, frontload a novel.

Kathleen also provides some helpful examples of what she means by relationship building. She defines "relationship" as, "…I know what your family is like, I know what you do outside of school…" This definition acknowledges that the term "student" itself is limiting in the sense that it captures such a small portion of a person's identity. Yes, they are students, but they are also sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters. They have backstories. They have dreams, fears, passions. They have identities *plural*, some of which contradict with one another, in ways both useful and not. In short, they are living, breathing human beings, each one an embodiment of sociologist Avery Gordon's concept of complex personhood (2008). They cannot be contained by the label of "student," which, at the secondary level, isn't a choice anyway. To build a relationship with a "student," a teacher must engage the "not-student," those parts of the student that are not immediately visible: "…what your family is like…what you do outside of school…"

The most concrete example of relationship building that Kathleen provides in this quote might be dismissed as flattery—"I talk to you if you got your hair cut and let you know you look nice"—but I would argue that, by paying this simple compliment,

Kathleen accomplishes a great deal more than mere flattery. Kathleen's students, like a lot of American high school students, attend six classes per day where they share a classroom with at least 25 other students. Their teachers might see 120-plus students over the course of a day. These contextual factors discourage the kind of personal attention that Kathleen describes. There are teachers who struggle to learn 120 names let alone know their students well enough to notice that they got a haircut. It is a small but powerful way to say, "Hey, I notice you." Of course, it need be said that the effectiveness—and the appropriateness—of this compliment depends, in no small part, on the identity of the teacher, and the already established relationship between the student and teacher. Kathleen makes it work because of her nurturing persona and the way she spreads out her attention; she did not, as far as I could tell, play favorites. There are certainly instances where a compliment from a teacher—even one as seemingly innocuous as "Nice haircut"—might be received by the student as unwanted attention. As eager as we might be to build relationships with our students, we can't forget that relationships take time and that our students are equal partners in those relationships.

Relatedly, Kathleen shares details of her life—the not-teacher—with her students. She displays pictures of her son and talks openly about being a single mother. Her life is not off-limits to students. During a light-hearted pre-reading discussion about situations in which it would be okay for a parent to wake up his/her child at 2:30 in the morning, a student asks Kathleen, "Would you do that to your son?" She laughs and responds, "No!" Whenever she asks students to connect the text to their lives—a strategy she uses frequently—she often weighs in with her own personal connection. It is risky to allow someone entry into one's life, let alone an entire classroom of someones. Kathleen

models the kind of honesty and trust that she hopes her students will bring to the table. Additionally, her openness—and subsequent vulnerability—equalizes the power dynamic somewhat. I qualify with "somewhat" because what might be a small risk for Kathleen might be a big risk for some students. Just like it would be an abuse of power for a teacher to forbid his/her students from drinking beverages and then to sip coffee throughout class, it would be a similar abuse of power for a teacher to expect students to open up without opening up him/herself. Indeed, this is precisely the kind of power disparity that the teachers in this study are intent on challenging (more on this in Chapter 5). This is not to say that teachers should be open books. Boundaries are important here; it is possible to overshare and/or to share inappropriately—the former being more about quantity and the latter about content. Kathleen's sharing—or at least what I saw—was judicious and related to the topic at hand.

Kathleen identifies trust as a key outcome of the relationships that she builds with students:

> …they trust that what I'm doing with them is necessary. I try to tell them, you know, [I'm] not going to do anything with you that you don't need. We're not in here just to waste time, so trust that what I'm doing with you is important and valuable to you in your future. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

She argues that students with whom she has established a relationship that goes deeper than "we were assigned to the same room" are more likely to trust that she has their best interests at heart, and, therefore, are more likely to take advantage of the educational opportunities they receive in her class. Using the vernacular of the business world, it is a

way to achieve "buy-in." This kind of buy-in might be especially important in a dialogic classroom that depends on students saying their ideas out loud.

Kathleen's students corroborated this account of Kathleen's emphasis on relationships. According to one student, one of the things that distinguishes Kathleen from other teachers is her effort to connect with *all* students:

> [Kathleen] reaches out and, like, she tries to get everyone kind of on a personal level, like, not offensive or anything, but she just tries to reach out to everybody and not just to the kids who talk. Like, some teachers, they just find it easier to reach out to the students who talk 'cause they don't feel like trying to reach out to the quiet kids, which is not cool. But she just reaches out to everybody, makes everybody feel like they're a part of the class. (Student Focus Group)

Kathleen's relationship-building is distinguished by its inclusiveness. She doesn't just build relationships with the funny students or the loud students or the opinionated students—the students who make themselves known; she even reaches out to the quiet student who sits in the back and always has a headphone in one ear and who prefers to work alone. Interestingly, the student who made this comment was *not* one of the quiet students. Her observation suggests that students notice when their teachers act to include or exclude other members of the class.

In my introduction to Kathleen in Chapter 3, I write, "There is an edge to her warmth (and a warmth to her edge)." I want to warrant that statement here since I believe both parts of it—the warmth and the edge—are related to respect. Kathleen's own description of her classroom environment is helpful:

> I'm not a yeller. I tell my students every year, you're not going to make me have to raise my voice. You know, my tone may go up a little higher or may get a little louder but I'm never like, "Rawr rawr rawr." That's not me. I don't have to be and they respect that and I respect that they don't make me have to be that kind of teacher. But, yeah, it's very warm and inviting. I am very a nurturing person and they like that. But I'm very structured and I have high expectations as well. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

As an observer in Kathleen's class, the word "nurturing" resonates with what I saw. She emanates patience and kindness, but also asks that her students meet her academic and behavioral standards. Take the following snapshot from one of Kathleen's classes. It is the final fifteen minutes and her students are working on writing topic sentences. Kathleen circulates the room, checking in with individual students on their progress. She takes her time with each student, offering encouragement but also specific guidance on how to make their sentences stronger. I am struck (as I watch the video) by how much time she gives to each student and by how seriously she engages their ideas.

At the same time, the overall atmosphere in the room is relaxed. Students talk quietly with their neighbors, use their phones, get out their seats for various reasons. Yet there seems to be a line that students know not to cross. When two students begin speaking across the room to each other, Kathleen addresses the class: "Okay, let's get back to focusing on [the topic sentences], please." When she notices a student with his head down, she touches his arm gently, asks, "What are you doing? You're thinking? Is that what you're doing?" and walks away without admonishing him further. Her respect is double-edged in this instance. She does not scold him. In fact, she walks away, leaving

the student to make a choice about what to do next. But she also notices him, the mere fact of which communicates to the student that he is not going to be able to hide in this class, that she cares about his education. The next time she returns to the student's side of the room, he has drafted a sentence.

This has been a relatively deep dive into the orientation of a single teacher. However, I think it was worth lingering with Kathleen for a moment to establish the basis for what I consider to be an exceptionally student-centered orientation—and one that expresses and nurtures a deep respect for students' personhood. At the heart of this orientation is a belief in the importance of connecting with students, of creating a classroom in which students feel noticed and appreciated. This was not something that Kathleen turned on and off but that suffused all of her teaching. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it would be dangerous to draw any conclusions about Kathleen's teaching without first understanding this important context. I turn now to the other teachers to make the case that, despite their differences as people and as teachers, and despite significant differences in context, they too endeavored to meet their students on a more personal and human level.

Kevin used humor as an access point to his students. Randomly click on any of the videos I collected from his class and it is not long before his particular brand of humor makes itself felt. He begins one class by saying:

> Week 25, Day 1. Welcome…to the ides of March. You gotta be careful up until, like, March 16th, 17th. Right now it's still, like, crazy stuff happening in the universe. The ides, unlucky things can happen, you gotta watch your back. (Kevin, 3/14/16)

It's not *funny*, exactly, and none of the students laugh—many have not yet quieted down and he does not do more to explain the expression to those who are unfamiliar with it—but it is a lighthearted way to get the class's attention, and establishes, or, more precisely, continues—since this is three quarters through the school year—a kind of jokiness that, I argue, is central to Kevin's presentation of self. In the way that Kathleen presents a down-to-earth tenderness, Kevin presents a wry jokiness—what I might call dad humor with an edge. Although I cannot speak to the degree of intention behind these presentations of self, I do think they communicate important things to students, including the terms of the relationships that the teachers hope to build with their students.

After warning students about the ides of March, Kevin continues, "I would like to let you know that today, once again, we will be visiting the realm of new vocabulary words, so we will get back to our vocabulary journey." A few of the students can be heard trying out the word "realm." He notices and responds, "Realm's a good word." Then, "I'm going to read reflections from last Friday. I would prefer not to talk on top of y'all as if you guys are a coterie of woodland creatures chattering," lingering on (and clearly relishing) each word of the phrase "coterie of woodland creatures chattering." A student asks, "What does that even mean?" Another student: "Use context clues!" By this point, the class has mostly quieted down and is ready to listen to the reflections. Although it might have been more efficient to just say, "Listen up," or "Up here please," Kevin has successfully gotten the class's attention, and done so in a way that communicates a tone of good-humouredness. Moreover, the jocular back-and-forth with students indicates a healthy two-way line of communication. Students are comfortable enough with Kevin to playfully poke at him—"What does that even mean?"—and he, although he does not do

so here, typically does not hesitate to poke back. This kind of playful ribbing is not the only way Kevin builds relationships, but it is one way that Kevin attempts to reach across the chasm that can exist between teacher and student.

Another example of Kevin's use of humor as a way to connect with his students and as a scaffolding for academic work is his approach to vocabulary quizzes. I must preface this by acknowledging there is a large body of research that suggests Kevin's approach to teaching vocabulary—assigning a weekly or bi-weekly list of vocab words—is outdated and ineffective. That said, what I want to focus on here is the extra effort Kevin puts into taking a rather old-fashioned teaching exercise—the vocabulary quiz—and turning it into something that recognizes there are young people in the room and, therefore, it is important to reach out and engage them. Rather than merely providing a set of bland sentences and asking students to fill-in-the blank with the appropriate vocab words, Kevin creates an entire story with characters and a conflict. These stories are engineered to be amusing and relevant to students—relevant in the sense that they have young protagonists involved in exaggerated versions of scenarios that would be familiar to most teenagers. For example, one of these vocab quiz stores focuses on a young "nihilist" by the name of Arbuckle. When Arbuckle's 10th grade English teacher, Mr. Koby, whom I presume to be a stand-in for Kevin, tells him that, despite his nihilism, he still must keep up with the *Lord of the Flies* reading schedule, Arbuckle "immediately vomited all over Mr. Koby's gorgeous and highly attractive Crocs, as if the prospect of reading a classic 20th century novel provoked a _____ reaction in his digestive system." This elicited some laughter from the room, particularly the tongue-in-cheek description of the teacher's footwear.

I do not wish to make too much of this anecdote; Kevin's vocab quiz stories are certainly not groundbreaking pedagogy (or comedy). However, they infuse a relatively traditional pedagogical technique with personality. They reach out to students in the hope that they will reach back. This is always a risk: *what if no one laughs?* And they are a reminder that Kevin is willing to put in the extra work necessary to make his class engaging. This was not some vocabulary exercise ripped from a workbook; it was an original composition and, as such, took time on Kevin's part. The vocab stories allow Kevin to showcase another side of himself—the writer side, who is constantly looking for ways to apply his imagination. Additionally, this particular excerpt demonstrates a willingness to poke fun at himself—in this case, his sartorial choices. By not taking himself too seriously, he makes himself more human and, therefore, accessible to his students. Again, it's an invitation: *You can make of fun of me. I might make fun of you back. But that's something we can do together.*

Kevin also sets the stage for more substantive relationship building through the appearance of his room, which communicated important information about who he is as a person and a teacher. The walls were filled with posters, and by "filled," I mean, if Kevin wanted to put something new on the wall, he would have had to take something down first. In addition to the posters, one wall was lined with books, the other with a couch on which three or four students sprawled each day. Some might call Kevin's classroom "messy" or "chaotic"; they wouldn't be wrong. I prefer the less pejorative characterization of "lived in." Unlike some teachers, who use posters to communicate academic content, Kevin used his posters to communicate support for a variety of causes and/or groups, or to signal fandom of some sort. For example, there was an anti-handgun

poster, a flyer advertising the LGBTQ club, a poster with the logo for a local youth press, reprinted covers of classic comic books, a Rachel Carson poster, a photograph of Muhammad Ali in the ring, a team photograph of the U.S. National Under-17 hockey team (many members of which attend Kevin's school). There was something up there for many different kinds of students: the writer, the athlete, the feminist, the student of color, the LGBTQ student, the lover of comics, the environmentalist, the movie aficionado. This was a way, I think, for Kevin to signal that he cares about some of the things that his students care about, and to welcome them into his space. In addition, some of the posters commemorated aspects of Kevin's life (e.g., a advertisement for a poetry reading he did at a nearby university, a banner for the sports radio show where he was a disc jockey) and, thus, permitted a small but varied window into Kevin's life. Taken together, they made clear that he did not fit easily into a box: he was a jock, a poet, an activist, a father. They also signaled to his students that his outside-of-school life was not off-limits to his students, and that "teacher" was just one part of his identity.

Daniel uses some of the same techniques as Kevin to connect with his students, though, since these techniques bear the personalities of the teachers, they manifest differently. Like Kevin, Daniel participates in spirited, off-the-cuff exchanges with students. However, he does not seek so much to engage in a verbal repartee with his students, as to laugh with them about some absurdity or another. A good example of this pattern of interaction comes during students' share-out of the journal prompt: "Describe the greatest party you could possibly throw in every detail. Money and physics are no object."[12] One student begins by saying, "So, um, mine's going to be at a tropical forest,

[12] This prompt was intended to lead into a discussion about what the reader can learn about Gatsby from the parties he threw.

like, back when dinosaurs were still a thing." The student's comic delivery is strong and the class laughs accordingly. Daniel plays along and interjects, "Back when they were still a thing? Okay." Later, another student begins, "I would just have a party where I, like, clone myself…" Daniel does an exaggerated double take here, signaling to the student and to the rest of the class that the response has attained the desired level of outlandishness. Later, once the same student finishes her description of playing in a string quartet with three of her clones, Daniel observes wryly, "We have several people who decided to party by themselves." The student laughingly objects to this characterization: "I'm not by myself. I'm *with* myself." "Same thing," Daniel declares. In these examples, Daniel acts as a willing collaborator in the students' verbal play.

In addition, Daniel makes himself emotionally available to his students. I witnessed this first-hand when a student, Ruby, unexpectedly became emotional during a one-on-one conference about her ideas for the *Great Gatsby* essay. Here is a transcript of the exchange:

Ruby: So I really like the idea of doing queer theory, but I don't know, I need help.

Daniel: [*nodding*] Okay.

Ruby: [*starting to cry*] I need some help.

Daniel: That's alright.

Ruby: I'm like…I have a lot of stuff going on right now.

Daniel: Are you okay? First, let's ignore the paper for a minute. Are you okay? Is everything alright? Is there anything I can do?

Ruby: No, I'll start crying if I talk about it.

Daniel: Okay, well, then we don't need to talk about it, but, please, Ruby, remember you can if you need to.

Ruby: I'm like, you know, because I'm not prepared for, like, [*gestures towards the essay*]…

Daniel: Well, so, give it—take a couple more days.

Ruby: I know, like, I'm just like—

Daniel: But get it done.

Ruby: I'm going to get it done, it's just, like—

Daniel: But if you need a couple days, take a couple more days.

Ruby: It's just, like, there's lots of stuff.

It's a quick exchange, forty seconds, but in those forty seconds, Daniel shows a willingness to a) listen to Ruby, and b) individualize his class requirements based on the needs of the particular student in front of him. He is not made uncomfortable by Ruby's emotions, nor does he pressure her to share what's going on. He makes himself available, but once Ruby makes it clear that she doesn't want to talk about it—her "No" is emphatic—Daniel moves on. Interestingly, even though Daniel softens the deadline for the assignment, he still emphasizes that Ruby must complete the assignment. In the midst of otherwise showing Ruby such care and understanding, he resumes a stricter, more teacherly tone—"But get it done." I do not read this as an interruption or a negation of that care and understanding. He is her teacher after all—not her therapist, or her friend, or her guardian—and his primary obligation is to support her as a student. Certainly English class takes a backseat to life sometimes, which Daniel readily acknowledges throughout the interaction, but he also wants to be clear that his flexibility as a teacher has limits.

And perhaps he is also intimating that putting off the paper indefinitely will only cause more stress. Whatever his motivation, it is reminder that building relationships with students may necessitate adjusting or personalizing one's teacher hat, but it does not mean taking that hat off completely.

Daniel is perhaps a little more guarded than Kevin when it comes to his personal life, but he talks freely about his intellectual and aesthetic passions. His love for movies was a through line. For example, the party he describes during the share-out described above takes places in a kind of movie house with different movies and live theater acts playing in each room "and you could just walk from one to another and just see weird stuff." One of the students presses, "Would you even talk to anyone during that party?" and he replies, "Sure, in between the movies!" There is a sweet nerdiness to Daniel's presentation of self that softens the rest of his rather outsized persona. He exudes an intellectual confidence that might be intimidating to some students, but the *Star Wars* tie and Darth Vader action figure looming over the classroom help to bring him back down to earth somewhat. He also happily engages students' interests. For example, when a student mentions that the indie rock band Florence + the Machine has a song about the green light in *The Great Gatsby*, Daniel responds approvingly, "It is a good song."

An interesting point of contrast here is Sara. Because her school was located within a community college and she did not have a classroom that was hers and hers alone, she was not free to decorate it or give it any of the personality that the other teachers in the study could give to their rooms. And whereas the other teachers wore clothes that, in different ways, sought to downplay or to personalize their identities as teachers, Sara's clothes were as close to a modern day teacher uniform as you could get.

More to the point, I never heard her mention a single thing about her personal life. She simply did not, in my presence, step outside of her teacher identity. She could be playful, but it was always within the context of the academic work at hand. This is all to say that, in my observations, and compared with the other participating teachers, Sara seemed less willing to engage with students on a level beyond the strictly professional. Yet, when I asked a small group of students what Sara did to support them in having good discussions, the first response offered was, "Being nice, friendly, relatable, and cool to us." This response affirmed my general impression; the students liked her and trusted her. But she accomplished this without resorting to more transparent attempts to connect personally with her students.

The most salient aspect of Sara's presentation of self was her consistent and sunny professionalism. In this, she never wavered. Even when her students were less compliant (which, to be clear, was not often), she was a model of good-humored patience. She was not given to detectable mood swings, bouts of frustration, or extracurricular detours. She was, in a word, consistent—consistently hard-working, and consistently encouraging. Perhaps her students took a measure of comfort or security from this. They could count on her professionalism. Sara was also unusually transparent about some of her professional decision-making. On the first day of class,[13] she explained she would be experimenting with a radically different approach to teaching writing this semester after she had to come to the realization that her previous approach was not meeting her expectations. This was a window into her teacher brain, and I posit that it made her into a more human teacher—that is, a teacher who was growing and learning

[13] I began observing Sara's class on the first day of the new semester, which was also the class's first meeting.

alongside her students. Additionally, her excitement about teaching was genuine and palpable, both in her conversations with me and in front of the class. There was truly nowhere else she wanted to be. I think this made her students feel cared for, educationally speaking.

Here she is the day after the students' first writing working workshop. In these workshops, students break off into three groups, one supervised by Sara, and the others by two other teachers who agreed to volunteer their time:

> I want to begin by talking about the writing workshop yesterday. I heard from Ms. X, and if you know her, you know this is how she talks, she said [*doing an impression of Ms. X*], "It was so fun!" She really, really loved working with Group 1. So great job, Group 1, you totally impressed her. Ms. Y—you might know her a little bit less well—she said everybody did great. She said you gave great feedback, you got in depth with your discussion. I don't know what happened with the group that stayed here, maybe they had a terrible teacher workshopping with them? I'm just kidding [*a student says, "I was about to say!"*]. You were also excellent. You guys, what this tells me is that you understand how to do a writing workshop…. So, I'm so happy. This is part of the reason I'm having a great day is because everyone's been coming up to me and saying, "I loved the workshop. The students did so great." So, nice job to all of you. (1/20/16)

I include this excerpt because I think it is a helpful window into Sara's teaching, and exemplifies what her student might have meant when she described Sara as "nice," "cool to us," etc. Her objective here is clearly to encourage her students. She wants them to

know they did a good job during the workshops and she is proud of them. These are students who were selected for writing remediation, and, therefore, may be wanting in academic confidence. In addition to giving praise, Sara shows her playful side. She does an impression of Ms. X (which, I should say, is very clearly not a mean impression), eliciting some laughter and knowing smiles from the group. She pretends for a moment that she's not going to praise the third and final group and suggests that maybe it's because they had a bad teacher (wink-wink). This playfulness, an element that is present in all four of the participating teachers, indicates an awareness of audience, and a commitment to creating an atmosphere that is light and fun. Finally, she shares a piece of personal information, albeit personal information that is rooted in her professional identity. She says she's having a great day because the other teachers said they loved the workshop. I think one way teachers can indirectly demean their students is by not seeming to work hard or care about their job. Maybe Sara is exaggerating the extent to which her day was altered by the teachers' feedback, but in her joyfulness, she conveys real enthusiasm for her work, and, by extension, her students' school lives.

In the following excerpt from a class, Sara informs her students that one of their classmates, who is not present at the moment, has a history of seizures, and therefore, they should be prepared for the possibility of him having a seizure in class:

> Ben told me that there was an incident with Daniel in last hour. I wasn't planning on talking with you about this, but it seems like a good time. Some of you have had classes with Daniel before, um, and you know that sometimes he has seizures. It's happened in English class before, so I know what to do. If you haven't had class with Daniel before, what you need to know is that he is not in danger. He's

> not dying. He's just having all of his muscles in his body contract, and it's kind of embarrassing. So if Daniel ever has a seizure in our class, I will ask you all to leave the room because Daniel needs some privacy….It is for sure embarrassing, and in years, decades past, people with epilepsy used to not be allowed to do things like hold jobs. They really had a lot things closed to them. So it's important that we make sure Daniel is welcomed as part of our class….If you happen to be sitting next to Daniel, and I hope you will not be scared to sit next to him. He's not going to hurt you, you can't catch epilepsy, it's not contagious….Obviously, he doesn't know that we're talking about this right now. But he knows that people know. The only reason I wouldn't have told you is because it's possible he will never have a seizure in our class, and then you don't need to expect it. But I think it will help us perhaps to feel a little less nervous if we know that that's what's happening. (1/20/16)

Sara goes on to describe the exact protocol for what to do if one of them happens to be sitting next to Daniel when he has a seizure. I include this excerpt because I think it shows how Sara's professionalism can manifest as caring about the emotional lives of her students. She understands that having a seizure can be ostracizing or othering, and that this can be communicated simply by being inordinately scared or disturbed by somebody's seizure. And so she seeks to normalize Daniel's seizures in the minds of her students, and also to foreground Daniel's feelings—"It is for sure embarrassing." She is also careful to explain that she's not talking behind Daniel's back, or sharing information with them that he wouldn't be comfortable with her sharing—in other words, that she made a professional decision to share some information about another student so that the

class is better equipped to treat that student respectfully. I cannot say this for certain, but it seems possible that Sara's public and humane treatment of Daniel laid some important trust groundwork with the rest of the class.

As I've stated, Sara, unlike the other teachers in the study, did not choose to share a lot of information about herself. Nor did she make extra effort to learn about the students' lives. Revealingly, the speeches that the students wrote about one another were "fake" speeches in which all of the details were made up. The focus of her interactions with students was almost always the academic content. Perhaps this was because she was uncomfortable delving into more personal territory, or because she felt it would unsettle some of the professional boundaries she perceived as important. Regardless, Sara's example provides a different sort of model for how to build relationships and establish trust with students, and suggests that teachers need not connect with students on a personal level as long as students know and trust them as teachers.

I want to make a note here to acknowledge that this study does not really take on the cultural nuances of giving and receiving respect. Claims of that nature would require a much more targeted kind of study. That said, each of the participating teachers did express and/or demonstrate attention to the diversity of identities, including cultural identities, represented in their respective classrooms. Daniel, for example, spoke about the challenge of getting three Muslim-American boys in his class to speak during discussions:

> Those three boys were my most difficult in terms of getting into engagement, and….I really try and do a lot to encourage them to talk, but there's also some

> tricky cultural stuff happening, where, you know, talking in front of women for Islamic teenage boys is difficult. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

This cultural understanding influenced Daniel's assessment of two of the boys during a graded discussion:

> Rayn there, on the left, he's engaged, he's listening. Now when he talks, it's shy and it's quiet, but he's still engaged in listening. I never could quite get Ahmar there to engage as fully as I wanted him to. But I would say that even then, even with his head down, he is still listening, although I would be the first to say that he is not experiencing the full benefit of a graded discussion. But, yeah, I don't want to say that I'm, like, happy about it or anything. I would love for him to participate more, and I would love to find a way for him to participate more, but with the graded discussions, I feel like there's always a couple of people who just, talking is hard, and because it's so hard, you kind of shut down and do your best to not even think about where you are. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

Because the boys struggle to speak, Daniel focuses on their listening. This becomes the barometer of their engagement. Even the student with his head down, Daniel argues, is listening. Though this cultural understanding made Daniel more patient with the boys' reticence—and more expansive in his definition of engagement—it did not lead him to accept it. He still pushed the boys to speak more:

> I understand that there's a kind of cultural component to having difficulties speaking in front of girls, but I'm also kind of personally so radically in favor of coed education and the importance of it and the need for it, that I'm going to push [them] through it anyway. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

In these quotes, Daniel demonstrates an awareness of and a respect for what he perceives to be the culturally derived habits of mind of a small subset of students—habits of mind that, as he sees it, bear directly on the students' behavior in discussions. At the same time, he struggles to reconcile his students' reluctance to speak in front of women with his own pedagogical and personal values.

Kathleen, too, demonstrated an awareness of and respect for her students' varied identities. Here she describes the academic benefits of teaching in a multicultural setting, specifically with regards to discussions:

> I've always worked in, like, a multicultural setting to where we have, I think, the pleasure of having students of different races, of different backgrounds, of different ethnicities, you know, of different social statuses, because I think that gives variety to a discussion. When everybody is exactly the same and they all have the same background and the same experiences, they can't really share those because everybody's already had them. So I think having that type of setting in my room lends itself to a better discussion, yeah, and being able to respect one another's views and one another's differences. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

Though Kathleen did not speak directly to the extent to which she adapted or refined her pedagogy to better match the culture(s) of her students, I did observe practices that, in my mind, would fall under the umbrella of culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, as a white, middle class teacher of predominantly African-American students, she did not enforce white, middle class notions of what a classroom sounds like when students are learning. Specifically, her class could be quite noisy, not in an out-of-control way,[14] but

[14] She never struggled to get students to quiet down when she needed students to be quiet.

in a way that departed from, say, Daniel's and Sara's classrooms. After Kathleen asked a question, students often reacted out loud, speaking over one another. Not only did this not bother her, it was her intent. I attend to Kathleen's approach to managing participation more thoroughly in Chapter 5, but I reference it here to show one deeper way in which Kathleen was attuned to the cultural resources of her students.

At the same time, I must also draw the reader's attention to some potentially problematic aspects of Kathleen's treatment of content. On a couple of occasions, she voiced understandings of the text that, I would argue, detracted from her efforts to show respect for her students' personhood, particularly their identities as Black Americans. The following is an excerpt from a discussion about the meaning of the title to Maya Angelou's memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:

> **Kathleen:** So the singing, okay, what is that singing, do you think? We didn't really talk about or discuss the singing part, but think about it. What is the purpose of a bird's voice or singing? Demetrius.
>
> **Demetrius:** Wouldn't the singing be, like, you feel free, or something like that?
>
> **Kathleen:** Okay, good, yeah, singing could equal freedom. Have you guys ever been so happy you just sang or, like, let out a tune?
>
> [A couple of students say "yes."]
>
> **Kathleen:** Yeah, of course you have. You might not admit it, but I know you have.
>
> [A student makes a bird call. Kathleen laughs and praises the realism of the call.]
>
> **Kathleen:** Yeah, I mean, when we think of singing, well, you know, um, what do you guys know about, like, slavery and singing?

[Multiple students respond. I can't make out any individual responses, but by the sheer quantity of talking, it seems reasonable to assume that students are familiar with the concept of slave songs.]

Kathleen: Yeah, they would sing spirituals when they worked. Um, songs of freedom. In general, when we think of singing, we think of happiness, right? Because when we sing, we're usually happy.

The most generous interpretation of Kathleen's contribution here is that it stops short, leaving her intended meaning dangerously ambiguous. Is she really saying slaves sang because they were happy? Or is she trying to make the point that singing isn't always a product of happiness and that it might communicate a more complicated set of emotions? I hope she was trying to do the latter, but if so, that meaning is not clear, in her words or in her tone or from the fact that this was the only example she gave. Perhaps she was operating from an assumption that her students were sophisticated enough to infer that she invoked slavery to make the case that singing doesn't always come from a place of happiness. Whatever her intention, I probably shouldn't have to work this hard to put a positive spin on her treatment of this subject matter. She leaves open the possibility that she thinks slaves sang because they were happy, an example of how respect for students is communicated not just interpersonally, but through one's treatment of content.

Kevin spoke candidly about how the gender imbalance in his class created an environment that was not supportive of his female students. It was a very boy heavy class—28 boys to 6 girls—and the boys tended to dominate most aspects of classroom life including discussions. In my first day in Kevin's class, I heard three of the girls complaining amongst themselves about the gender imbalance. When I asked them to

elaborate, one girl explained that the boys slowed everything down. Another explained how certain boys do most of the talking. Kevin was aware of the problem, mentioning it to me when I was making a decision about which of his 10th grade classes to observe, and then again in the preliminary interview: "It's very hard for [the girls] to speak up in a class like this so I think as a teacher I have to be really cognizant of that, try to call on them." That appears to be a tepid response—"try to call on them"—but I did witness him advocate in the moment for his female students, making an extra effort to quiet the rest of the class when they spoke, and repeating their contributions to ensure that they were heard over the tumult. In addition, one of the girls told me how, on one occasion, he allowed a small group of girls to work in a different room and they finished the assignment in, according to her, "half the time." These are imperfect solutions, but they demonstrate Kevin's recognition of a problematic classroom dynamic, and an intention, if not a perfectly executed strategy, to address that dynamic.

Sara showed considerable empathy for those students who struggle to speak or who are easily talked over. Sara attributed this orientation to her own experience as a self-described introvert. Here she elaborates:

> I read this book which is not a teaching book at all. It's called *Quiet* by Susan Cain and it's about introverts, and it was really, really helpful for a lot of things, but one of those things was group dynamics because she writes about how introverts in a group may not be the first people to jump in and speak up. Part of this is the way that introverts tend to process their thoughts and collect them before they speak and not just speak off-the-cuff. So she made me think about group roles and making sure everyone has a turn to speak because for myself,

> even in, like, our staff meetings, if it's just a free-for-all and everyone can talk if they want to talk or not, I'm not going to talk. It's not that I don't have any ideas or things to say. If I have a turn to speak, I'm happy to speak, but if I have to fight for my turn, no way. So I really sympathize with the quiet people in class. (Sara, Preliminary Interview)

This sympathy, as Sara calls it, manifests in her teaching as classroom protocols designed to give space to the quiet student, but also as what I might call her gentle hand when it comes to eliciting student talk. "I don't ever dock students for being quiet," she said, "because that could be part of your personality." To account for the quiet student, Sara includes listening and making eye contact as examples of ways that students can participate without speaking. Her empathy for the student experience was not limited to quiet students. When I asked what she hoped a student who had a written a particularly underdeveloped children's story had gotten out of the writing workshop, she replied: "I was hoping that they would be really kind, and they were. They were kind."

"It Doesn't Get Better Than That": Respect for students' intelligence

In addition to respect for students' personhood, the teachers in this study articulated and demonstrated significant respect for student thinking. We see this, for example, in the way Daniel evaluates without judging his students' contributions. In other words, he treats them as complex and sometimes contradictory windows into his students' thinking and as more than just opportunities to nod, "Yes, you're right," or "No, you're wrong." The difference between evaluating and judging, as I am defining them here, hinges on how the student idea is taken up by the teacher. "Evaluation" denotes the critical analysis of an idea—its merits and its limitations—without assigning a final

"judgment" of right or wrong (or good or bad). See the way Daniel pushes the student in the following exchange to clarify her ideas without communicating any kind of judgment about the quality (i.e., the rightness or wrongness) of those ideas. The exchange in question is taken from a discussion about F. Scott Fitzgerald's treatment of love in *The Great Gatsby*:

Daniel: Who is actually genuinely in love in this story?

[Multiple students respond. Bernice's response is the most audible.]

Bernice: Um, that one dude and the alcohol.

Daniel: Which dude and the alcohol?

Bernice: The one who was in the library.

Daniel: The owl?

Bernice: Yeah.

Daniel: And he's in love with alcohol?

Bernice. Yeah.

Daniel: Alright, maybe. That might be the truest relationship in the entire story. But what does it mean that this book seems so interested in love and relationships and marriage and cheating and everything, but no one is actually in love? What does that mean? What does that tell us?

[Bernice says something that is hard to hear.]

Daniel: Say it louder.

Bernice: Money can make you see things that aren't there.

Daniel: Okay, so you think it's primarily money?

Bernice: Yeah.

Daniel: Alright. Um, Myrtle wants more. What about Daisy? I mean, let's face it, Tom is richer than Gatsby. Even though Gatsby has a fortune now and is spending money like crazy, Tom is richer. So, it's not, it's not purely money that Daisy is after when she goes for Gatsby. Bernice.

Bernice: Um, I guess more security, in a way.

Daniel: Security, okay. Is that an important part of love? Is security an important part of love?

First, Bernice makes the wry observation that the only genuine form of love in the book is a minor character's love of alcohol. It is a comment that manages to be both witty and a real answer to Daniel's question at the same time. Whether addicts "love" the substance they're addicted to is, of course, debatable, but what Bernice is really saying is that none of the characters in the story are genuinely in love with one another. Daniel probes a little just to make sure he understands her comment ("Which dude and the alcohol?" "And he's in love with alcohol?"), acknowledges the biting truth of her comment ("That might be the truest relationship in the entire story."), then uses the implied meaning (none of the characters are genuinely in love) to keep pushing on his initial question about what Fitzgerald might be saying about love. Some teachers might have perceived Bernice's comment as a distraction from the topic at hand, especially given her casual delivery of the comment ("That one dude and the alcohol."). Daniel, on the other hand, spends enough time with it to perceive that it is, in fact, an indirect but real answer to his question, goes on to validate its out-of-the-box thinking, and, ultimately, incorporates it into his line of questioning.

Upon being redirected by Daniel to think specifically about what Fitzgerald is saying about relationships, Bernice ventures that she thinks money influences people's perceptions. In other words, people in the book don't fall in love with people; they fall in love with people's money. This is certainly a defensible thesis, and Daniel acknowledges as much by noting that Myrtle's affection for Tom seems at least partly driven by material desires. But, he continues, isn't it also significant that the central relationship of the book—Gatsby and Daisy's—is not so easily explained away as being financially motivated? Upon being presented with this important counterexample, Bernice reconsiders her initial idea and introduces the concept of security to the discussion. Note that Daniel never passes judgment on Bernice contributions; he does not classify her ideas as wholly right or wholly wrong. Rather, he acknowledges their merits ("That might be the truest relationship in the entire story." "Myrtle wants more.") and takes up their limitations—or the places where they might need more fleshing out—as a springboard to further the discussion ("So, it's not, it's not purely money that Daisy is after when she goes for Gatsby.")

These moves necessitate some quick thinking on Daniel's part. He had but a few seconds to check Bernice's comment against his own knowledge of the text and to prepare his response. It also necessitates listening deeply and trying to understand the contribution on its own terms, rather than within the frame of whatever answer or set of answers he was looking for. Daniel takes up Bernice's ideas in such a way as to make them, at least until the next student speaks, the light around which everyone else gathers. It is unlikely that Daniel specifically anticipated talking about security, but this is where Bernice goes, and so this is where their exchange goes. This is what is called "uptake" in

the literature and it is what makes this excerpt student-generated, despite the fact that Daniel does a fair amount of talking. To be clear, Bernice's comment possesses value outside of anything Daniel does, but by treating her as a respected thought partner, Daniel puts Bernice's comment in position to emit the maximum light possible. By engaging with Bernice's comment, and by enlisting her as a co-creator of the discussion, Daniel demonstrates notable respect for Bernice's thinking.

The following exchange from a stimulated recall helps to further illustrate Daniel's respect for student thinking. Daniel's retrospective analysis of a student's comment is prompted by watching a graded discussion[15] about the strengths and weaknesses of the movie adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*. Halfway through the discussion, a student (Ana) remarks that she did not think the book ever implies that Gatsby and Daisy "slept together." Upon hearing this, Daniel signaled for me to stop the video:

> **Daniel:** So, now, that's fascinating because I don't think you could miss the fact that Gatsby and Daisy slept together in the book, so there's just another kind of comprehension question. And I'm not saying that she didn't comprehend the book. I'm just saying that she needed, apparently, to have the sex stated instead of implied. And that tells me something about Ana's thought process. That tells me something about how Ana reads. It even tells me something a little bit about what Ana might need to work on, that Ana might need to work a little bit on subtlety. It also tells me a little bit about Ana in terms of, you know, where she is maturity-wise to handle issues of sex and things of that nature. Some of these students are

[15] Approximately hour-long discussions during which Daniel did not speak. I describe graded discussions at length in Chapter 5.

ready and able to talk intelligently about sex and mature topics, and some of them—I mean, they're only 10th graders—are not. And so, another thing that is great about these whole class discussions is how much I learn about each of the kids. I learn a lot about their personalities. I learn a lot about what they're thinking, what their interests are, what they're doing, and then that's information that I can carry over, not just into kind of what I need to teach, but to carry over into more effectively teaching.

AB: So in that case, this kind of basic misunderstanding surfaces in Ana's comment, and it may or may not be attended to—

Daniel: But, see, that's the thing though. She's actually not wrong. [F. Scott Fitzgerald] never says that they slept together. All she is stating is that she did not see the implication that they were sleeping together, whereas a lot of other people did. But she's not wrong in terms of comprehension. Fitzgerald never says they have sex, never describes a sexual act between them. It is a full implication. So I would not want to correct her because she is not wrong. She's saying, my interpretation of that text is that they were close but not physically. And I think that's a perfectly valid interpretation, because she's right, it never says outright they had sex. So I especially would not want to correct someone on what is their own kind of interpretive move. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

At first glance, Daniel's initial assessment of Ana's comment ("I don't think you could miss the fact that Gatsby and Daisy slept together in the book.") reads as a final judgment of Ana's idea, the resounding sound of the gavel as the judge says, "Wrong." The rest of the exchange, however, convinces me that that is not his intended meaning. In fact, if

Daniel is rebuking anything here, it is the gap in his own pedagogical content knowledge. He seems to be expressing genuine surprise that, as a veteran teacher who has taught *The Great Gatsby* numerous times, he did not anticipate that a student might miss the fact that Daisy and Gatsby slept together. He goes on to enumerate the things that he learns from Ana's comment ("That tells me something about how Ana reads. It even tells me something a little bit about what Ana might need to work on, that Ana might need to work a little bit on subtlety. It also tells me a little bit about Ana in terms of, you know, where she is maturity-wise to handle issues of sex and things of that nature."). This is all data, Daniel contends, that will help him to better meet the educational needs of his students, and, in particular, Ana.

Additionally, Daniel balks at my casting of Ana's interpretation as a "misunderstanding." On the one hand, Daniel is defending his student against the researcher's (my) hasty conclusions. He is also making a relatively fine distinction between evaluating and judging, though he never uses those words. By calling Ana's idea a "misunderstanding," I signal to Daniel that I have concluded that Ana's idea is wrong, and therefore, requires some kind of corrective measure. This was, in fact, the question that I was working towards: *In a graded discussion (i.e., a discussion where Daniel doesn't speak), what happens when a student says something that is wrong and no one corrects him/her? What if the misunderstanding spreads?* In this case, Daniel wants to make clear that Ana's idea is, in fact, not wrong—that it is a reasonable interpretation of the text, even if, perhaps, it relies too heavily on a literal reading of what happens between Daisy and Gatsby. This last part is important. Daniel's orientation towards student thinking is not that every student idea is the most brilliant thing ever. On the

contrary, he is very clear-eyed about the limitations to Ana's interpretation. A rose-tinted view of student thinking might communicate a superficial sort of respect for students, but how respectful is it really if the teacher never actually engages with his students' ideas in an intellectually serious, and, therefore, critical way? By pushing back against my categorization of Ana's comment as a "misunderstanding" that needs to be "attended to," Daniel is not arguing that a teacher's critical eye be softened, but that it be purposed towards a different end. The purpose of evaluating students' ideas, at least in the context of a discussion, is not to determine whether the student's answer is right or wrong and, if wrong, to provide the right answer. Rather, it is to gain insight into the student's thinking (which is likely to have elements of both rightness and wrongness), and, if another student doesn't do it first, to take up the comment in an educationally deliberate way.

Like Daniel, Sara is an ardent believer that her students are capable of doing the very challenging work of literary analysis. This belief was especially evident in her openness to students' contributions, even those whose merits she did not recognize immediately. After doing some small group work on the Gregorio Lopez y Fuentes short story, "A Letter to God," Sara begins a whole-class discussion by asking, "Were there any passages that your group still feels confused by?" The first student to speak brings up a relatively small detail—*How did the protagonist go to the post office on a Sunday? Aren't post offices closed on Sundays?* It's a fair question, but also a relatively minor point, and one that I, as an observer, worried would send the discussion astray. This, as it turns out, was on Sara's mind as well. When I asked what she was thinking during this part of the discussion, she said, "I'm trying to figure out whether this is a stuck detail or an important detail. Yeah, I remember sort of thinking in that moment, 'Oh yeah, maybe

this isn't really important, but maybe it is, I'm not sure.'" What I am struck by here is Sara's willingness to defer to her students. By simply entertaining the possibility that this student might have picked up on an important detail that she missed, Sara exhibits a striking intellectual deference to her students' thinking. Later in our post-class conversation, when I suggest that student-generated discussions risk getting lost in the weeds, she adds, "Or they might bring up something that I didn't see or I don't know."

Whereas some teachers might have pivoted away from the student's question about post office hours and strong-armed the discussion back into a more "productive" direction as defined by the teacher, Sara opens it up to the rest of the class. And for several long minutes, the discussion does flounder somewhat, in the sense that it doesn't really get any traction on the student's question or the story more generally. The students spend a considerable amount of time trying to sort out this minor plot point rather than discussing something more substantial. Eventually a student—with the help of some gentle prodding from Sara—connects it to the larger theme of the protagonist's religiosity. But still, the discussion takes a long time to get to this point. Sara does not begrudge this "lost" time. As she makes clear to me afterwards, she regards this kind of inefficiency as part and parcel of literary analysis:

> If they're able to read the story on the first or second read and come up with these ideas, like, "Well, this is about what it means to have an authentic faith," well, you're not a high school student if you can do that. So, yeah, it feels messy, right? It's not a perfect or clean discussion. But this is also how I still work through texts. I don't finish a text and just tell you in this really succinct and elegant way what the theme is and what I think about it. (Sara, Stimulated Recall)

Sara's willingness to let the discussion flounder for awhile—i.e. to be "messy"—reflects both an understanding that literary analysis is hard work for anyone, including herself, and a faith in her students' capacity to do that hard work, if given the time and the support. Animating her hands-off approach is the belief that students can think and talk themselves into new perspectives on a text and that they very well may see something that she, the supposed authority in the room, did not see.

Another manifestation of respect for student thinking is a perception of students' capacity for talking about serious, adult issues. When I asked Kathleen what she thought were some of the chief barriers to leading good discussions, she identified fear of what students might say as a factor that keeps teachers from discussing serious subject matter with students. She clarifies:

> So, you know, when we're reading Maya Angelou, we're talking about rape, or when we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we're talking about racism. When I had my student teacher, his field instructor was in here observing and she was like, "I was so impressed that you guys can sit here and talk to your students about racism, and, you know, this isn't an all-Black school, it's not an all-White school, it's multiracial, and the way the students responded to it, you know, and how you can have it," and I said, "I have no fear in my discussions with my students." Obviously, there are certain things we don't talk about, that are too mature for them, but in the context of a 9th grade classroom, we can have conversations about rape or racism and our students have strong feelings and ideas about it and they should be able to express those. Because some of these things directly affect them. So sometimes I think that fear is what might hold teachers back, fear of

what might be said or what might come out of it. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

Kathleen acknowledges that discussions on adult topics might lead to students saying things that are challenging to her personally or to other students in the class. However, she still believes in their capacity to have those discussions. Moreover, the fact that these are often topics that directly affect students' lives is all the more reason to provide students a space to express their "feelings and ideas about it."

This was a place where Kathleen's orientation, as encapsulated by the above quote, did not perfectly match her practice. In a small sample of discussions that moved into sensitive territory, I observed Kathleen take relatively strict control of the discussion, moving it away from ideas or understandings that she regarded as dangerous. For example, in a discussion about ethics, described in greater detail in Chapter 6, a student asks if it would ever be okay to sell drugs. Rather than opening this question up to the class, Kathleen dismisses it outright by giving the student a chastising look and asking, "Why would selling drugs be good?" without waiting for an answer. She explained to me later that she did this because she did not want the student "to think that it is respectable to go out and sell drugs to make extra income." In this case, Kathleen's identity as a mentor to her students usurps her dialogic goals. She does not want to leave any room for the possibility that a student might walk away from a discussion in her class thinking it is morally justified in some circumstances to sell drugs. In her mind, it would have been professionally irresponsible to allow that idea to germinate. Setting the aside the question of whether her response was the best response[16]—and, indeed, whether a dialogic

[16] I should also note that Kathleen might have felt especially pressured to give this student the "right" message because there was a visitor (me) in the room.

response might have produced a more persuasive argument against drug-dealing—it is important to note here how other goals can conflict with dialogic goals. In this case, Kathleen's monologic response to the student's question really does seem at odds with her dialogic aspirations (which she describes so nicely in the above quote); however, as I will discuss more fully in Chapters 5 and 6, monologism need not always be at odds with dialogism. Sometimes monologic discourse—or, perhaps more accurately, discourse that appears monologic—cannot be so easily characterized as anti-dialogic when it is considered as a single piece of a larger dialogic project.

Regardless of Kathleen's response in this particular situation, I still think that a belief in students' capacity to have a discussion about mature topics speaks to a teacher's respect for his/her students. Yes, these kinds of topics present pedagogical challenges and might lead to difficult moments, but for a teacher to shut them down or avoid them entirely because they think students aren't ready or can't handle it is a deficit perspective incarnate. This doesn't mean there aren't responsible limits to what can be discussed in a 9th or 10th grade classroom. Kathleen acknowledges this: "…there are certain things we don't talk about, that are too mature for them…" Daniel, too, addresses these boundaries: "Some of these students are ready and able to talk intelligently about sex and mature topics, and some of them—I mean, they're only 10th graders—are not." Implied in Daniel's comment is the notion that, within reasonable limits, it is not for teachers to preemptively decide what their students are mature enough to discuss; rather, their students' observed capacities should guide teachers in making those decisions. Conversely, a baseline assumption that students *are* mature enough to discuss serious

subjects—provided the right supports are in place[17]—is a tangible example of respect for students' developing capacities.

Kevin demonstrates respect for student thinking in the way he honors student writing. Each day, for the first ten minutes of class, Kevin reads from what he calls "Reflections"—students' daily anonymous responses to a set of sentence starters provided by Kevin. These sentence starters are designed to get students to share something personal, sometimes something as basic as a food preference, but other times something more substantial. A few examples from my time in Kevin's class: "I'm hungry for…"; "I don't understand why…"; "I've always been horrible at…"; "My favorite rapper is…" To give a sense of the range of student responses, the "I'm hungry for…" sentence starter yielded both, "I'm hungry for anything chocolate," and, "I'm hungry for her to ask me." By electing to spend the first ten minutes of every class reading a random selection of these reflections, Kevin commits a considerable percentage of class time to the inner lives of his students. This commitment alone communicates a measure of respect. In Kevin's words: "…kids will write about some things in Reflections that are really on their mind, and then we can talk about them, and it brings some things into the classroom that maybe go beyond, like, what the curriculum is." Whereas for many teachers, what is "beyond the curriculum" might be viewed as a distraction from the curriculum, Kevin creates a protected space for students to share what's "really on their mind" ranging from the commonplace to the profound—in essence, sending the message that who you are, what you think, how you feel, matters. This has implications for

[17] I spend time on what these supports look like in the teachers' classrooms in Chapter 6.

relationship-building as well, but I include it here because it is indicative of the way Kevin tries to make room for student thinking.

Moreover, Kevin attempts to imbue the daily reading of reflections with the weight of a public reading. He accomplishes this mostly with his voice. As a former talk radio host and a slam poet, Kevin understands how to use his voice to dramatic effect. When reading students' reflections, he often assumes what I call his "poetry voice," the same voice he uses when he reads aloud from *Lord of the Flies*, the book they are reading together. This tone of voice serves as a kind of aural clue to the students that their reflections matter, that they are important textual documents, that they contain humor, astute observations, and, sometimes, wells of deep feeling.[18]

Kevin treats his students' long-form writing with the same kind of importance. During my time in his class, the students turned in only one major writing assignment, a coming-of-age-essay. On the day he returned the essays, he spent the final fifteen minutes of class reading passages he found to be particularly evocative or beautiful. As with the daily reflections, he used his voice to emphasize the poetic power of the students' words and ideas. He peppered the read aloud with praise for specific characteristics of the writing: e.g., "Think about how many senses are in that image!" "This writer had really nice physical description." Even by saying "writer" instead of "student," Kevin communicates to his students that they are not just students who happened to write an essay (which is likely how many of them think of themselves), but writers who happen to be students. It is a subtle difference, and one that emphasizes the students' claim to what they may perceive as an out-of-reach identity. Remember, Kevin's was not an Honors

[18] This is not to say that Kevin' students assigned the same gravity to the reading of reflections. It was a large and noisy class, and Kevin often had to ask them to listen respectfully.

class; these were students who ostensibly struggled at English, who were not recommended for the more advanced track, or who chose, for reasons of their own, the general education track. By calling them "writers," Kevin positions the students as equals to him, as fellow writers[19] rather than as his pupils. This is the work of identity building, or, perhaps more accurately, identity rebuilding, as these were all students with ten plus years of schooling under their belts and, therefore, relatively well-formed ideas about their aptitudes or lack thereof. And it is a reminder that teachers do not only communicate respect in grand gestures, but in subtle, blink-and-you'll-miss-it ways as well.

Perhaps most moving was the way Kevin seemed to take genuine aesthetic pleasure in his students' writing. For example, as he read the coming-of-age essays aloud, he lingered after reading the line, "…the city meets the metal stripe of the sea," read it again, and pronounced, with unaffected awe, "It doesn't get better than that." If it was a planned response, it certainly did not seem so. Rather, it played as if Kevin, a writer himself and a connoisseur of words, was stopped in his tracks by a student writer's remarkable turn of phrase. That a student might write a line as vivid as anything a "professional" writer might write was not a new discovery for Kevin. As the creative writing teacher and the leader of a local youth slam poetry program, Kevin had invested a great deal of time and energy into the idea that students are writers. By saying, "It doesn't get better than that," Kevin tips his hat to the anonymous writer and also communicates more generally that the class need not look to the canon or to somebody who officially bears the title of "writer" for good writing; they can look to themselves.

[19] Kevin often talks about his own writing—not in a boastful way, but in a this-is-what-I'm working-on-now kind of way—and some of the students have even chosen to read a collection of his poems during silent reading.

Finally, the coming-of-age essays that Kevin returned to the students were filled to the brim with comments and suggestions. It is true that there are different philosophies about whether it is more pedagogically sound to be generous with feedback or to leave just a few targeted comments. Regardless, Kevin's abundant feedback leaves the impression that he gives a great deal of time and energy to what his students write, an impression that may compel students to take more ownership over what they write and/or say in his class. As a visitor to Kevin's class, I was surprised by the sheer quantity of his notes. It ran somewhat counter to his persona, which, in general, was very relaxed, to the point of verging on low energy sometimes. That he would exert so much energy on their writing was a pleasant surprise and made me rethink how I was interpreting his affect overall. I suspect his commentary had a roughly similar effect on his students' perception of how much effort Kevin puts in as a teacher. This hearkens back to the previous section on respect for students' personhood, and it may be the thread that connects all of these cases: students have to feel like their teachers care about them, and that they are willing to put in *work*—emotional, relational, and pedagogical. Maybe a teacher doesn't have to do all three of those kinds of work equally well, but it seems plausible that a teacher must do some combination of them well in order to earn the requisite trust necessary for supporting a dialogic classroom.

Discussion

In sum, the participating teachers described and enacted orientations towards students and learning distinguished by a deep respect for students' intelligence and personhood. Kathleen cuts right to the heart of the matter: "A lot of my pedagogy is just the relationships I build." By saying that her pedagogy *is* the relationships that she builds,

she insinuates that building relationships cannot be a skin-deep kind of commitment; everything a teacher does—from classroom management to assigning work to teaching a text—must be an expression of that goal. And she implies that what she accomplishes over the duration of a school year would be impossible without the relationships she develops. It might seem odd that a dissertation on discussion would dedicate fifty pages to respect. However, for the teachers in this study, respect for students was foundational to their dialogic aspirations and practices. There is a way in which the discussions I observed, and that I describe in the following chapters, do not make sense without understanding this backstory. They would be disembodied, so to speak.

I wish to conclude this chapter by theorizing about two dimensions of the teachers' respect for students: 1) respect as a necessary precondition to teachers' willingness to have discussions, and 2) respect as a necessary precondition to students' willingness to participate in those discussions. I addressed the first dimension at the beginning of this chapter. If a teacher is going to allot class time to discussion, they must first have a will to do so. A teacher who does not believe that his students are capable of having a sophisticated discussion about a text is probably not going to make time for that discussion. There are certainly other factors that might affect a teacher's willingness to have discussions, like, for example, his/her beliefs about the discuss-ability of the content (more on this in Chapter 5). But if these teachers are any indication, a belief in students' capacities for discussion and interpretation also have a significant influence.

One of the implicit questions that arose in my introduction to this dissertation was, why don't discussions happen more in American classrooms, and, especially, why don't they happen more in classrooms that serve marginalized student groups? If

discussions, in part, emanate from teachers' respect for students—as they seem to for the teachers in this study—then it would follow that a lack of respect for students might recommend against the use of discussions. Anyone who has spent time in schools has heard the familiar refrain: "Oh no, maybe [fill-in-the-blank] works for *your* kids, but my kids just aren't ready for that." Although I want to avoid unduly challenging the professional judgment of teachers in under-resourced settings, scholars like Anyon (1980, 1997), Darling-Hammond (2010), and Delpit (2012) have described how lower socioeconomic students and students of color, on average, receive a dumbed down curriculum compared to their White middle and upper-middle class peers. If deeply ingrained deficit perspectives help to explain a large percentage of the disparities found in the educational experiences of American children, then it seems reasonable to conjecture that they might be similarly to blame for the lack of discussion found in classrooms that serve marginalized student groups.

This brings us to teacher education. If we believe that a) discussions are good, and b) respect for students is a determining factor in the likelihood that a teacher will lead discussions, then it would seem that a substantial investment in teacher candidates' orientations towards students would be worthwhile. This would certainly seem to support contemporary efforts in teacher education programs to challenge and, hopefully, transform teacher candidates' explicit and implicit deficit perspectives. This is not easy work, and it cuts into the very limited time that teacher education programs have with their candidates before they are teachers of record. Debates over how that time is best spent are contentious to say the least, and teacher education curriculum design is often perceived as a zero sum game; add something to the curriculum and something else needs

to be removed. Is time best spent teaching future teachers about who kids are and how to respect and respond to them or to teach them a set of teaching moves or skills? I take this question up more fully in the final chapter.

I also wish to theorize briefly about the potential relationship between teachers' respect for students and students' willingness to participate in those discussions. It is notable that all four teachers should demonstrate such careful attention to the relational or social-emotional component of teaching. Perhaps it would be foolhardy for teachers to expect students to speak freely and honestly without actively and consistently communicating that they (the teachers) care about them (the students). We have all been students and experienced, to lesser or greater degrees, classrooms in which we felt comfortable to speak and classrooms in which we did not. The teachers in this study make a case for the teacher-student relationship as an important determining factor in creating an environment where students feel comfortable to speak, and one which the teacher has (some) control over.

In his book, *Teaching and Its Predicaments*, David K. Cohen (2001) writes that teaching is a human improvement profession, which is to say that teachers "work directly on other humans in efforts to better their minds, lives, work, and organizations." One of the things that makes this work especially difficult is that, in order to be successful, teachers depend on their students. Unless the students readily accept the teachers' methods and purposes, they may resist them, making the teacher's job of improvement a very difficult one. As Cohen writes, "[Students] regularly fear improvement, doubt its possibility, are indifferent, or prefer something other than what [teachers] offer." I suspect it is precisely this understanding about the work of teaching that informs the

teachers' prioritization of relationships and the mutual trust that those relationships can foster.

Finally, I want to make a quick nod to the limitations of this study. First and foremost, it is a very small sample, and, as such, it only captures a very narrow range of the possible contexts for discussion. There is much to be learned about the orientations of teachers who lead discussions in other contexts, and of other teachers who lead discussions in similar contexts. Additionally, the teachers in the study were a fairly homogeneous group, in terms of race (White), age (between 35 and 45), and experience (between 10 and 20 years). There is much room, in particular, for the conception of respect that I develop here to be filled out with a more diverse set of instantiations. I think, in particular, this study is light on the cultural aspects of giving and receiving respect.

CHAPTER V: SHARING AUTHORITY

In Chapter 4, I described the teachers' respect for students which took the form of respect for students' personhood and respect for students' intelligence. Both forms of respect contribute to a classroom culture in which students feel cared for, personally and academically, which, as I note in the conclusion to the chapter, may have a positive effect on students' willingness to participate in discussions. Additionally, respect for students' intelligence would seem to be an essential component of a dialogic orientation, in the sense that a teacher who values what students have to say about a text is simply more likely to ask students what they think, not to mention do the work of supporting students in saying those things.

In this chapter, I focus on the teachers' mutual goal of sharing authority students—a pedagogical ideal that follows naturally (if not necessarily) from their respect for students. Specifically, I support the following sub-assertion: The teachers were characterized by a radical ambition to share authority with students. This included both intellectual authority—who possesses valued knowledge—and physical authority—who makes and enforces the rules. Although I am asserting here that the teachers' goal of sharing authority with students followed quite naturally from their respect for students, I am not arguing that it was a necessary outcome. In other words, I am not making the claim that a classroom in which students are treated with respect need be a dialogic classroom. However, I am suggesting that, for the teachers in this study, positioning their students as creators of knowledge rather than mere receivers of it was an important

manifestation of their respect. Also playing an influential role were the teachers' epistemological and disciplinary commitments, which recommended against the one-way transmission of a single and authoritative interpretation of a text.

In the literature on discussion, the idea of intellectual authority—i.e., who possesses valued knowledge—comes up quite often. Whereas in the traditional American classroom the teacher is the supposed expert in the room and all classroom structures and routines are arranged to support the teacher's central locus, a dialogic classroom, as it is portrayed in the literature, turns the traditional balance of authority on its head. Discussions demand that students learn from each other. Although this is what one might expect to find in a nation that is preparing its young people to be democratic citizens, it is not the reality in most American classrooms. As described in Chapter Two, the I-R-E model has remained the most prevalent form of classroom instruction. Certainly there are instructional purposes that are well served by I-R-E, but it is a model that places the teacher (or the text) front and center. Since this is what most students experience most of the time, it seems reasonable to conjecture that, over time, students internalize the structure of I-R-E in addition to some of its underlying messages about knowledge and power, and that by high school, they have been habituated to look to the teacher for the final say on academic matters (or, in many cases, the only say).

A dialogic classroom, then, requires a fundamental shift in whom the teacher and his/her students look to for valued knowledge. To that end, the teachers in this study take action to share authority with their students. At the same time, they do not abdicate their authority entirely—hence the word "share." Rather, they pick their moments to assert themselves. This is an important middle ground, and where a lot of the important action

happens as teachers balance their goal of leading "student-generated" discussions with other important goals.

In the following sections, I present examples of the teachers' attempts to shift the balance of authority in the direction of their students, drawing on both my observations and the teachers' descriptions of their practice. I spend most of my time here on *intellectual authority*, but I address *physical authority* as well—i.e., who makes and enforces the rules—under the assumption that there is a relationship between control of the body and control of the mind.

"My role as teacher…crushes their imagination": Intellectual Authority

In the following excerpt, Daniel describes how he tries to limit his own speaking during discussions:

> I'm always fine to talk about my opinions, but I definitely don't want to do it…before someone else has talked….My role as teacher—my ethos, as it were—crushes their imagination because I have the authority, because I am seen as the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong. If I give my interpretation, it…destroys any alternate interpretation that they've come up with, which is exactly what we don't want happening in English class because, again, we want them coming up with valid interpretations absolutely, but we also don't want to pretend that there's one interpretation, and as a teacher, any time you offer an interpretation, it cuts off a lot of other ones. Of course, by the time they're like juniors and seniors, they will start to disagree even with me, and that's great, and that's what I want, but, especially with 10th grade here, if I were to just jump in there and say, "Here's what I didn't like," everyone would be like, "Oh, okay," and they would write it

> down like it was truth, and that's why I have to keep quiet during [discussions]. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

What Daniel is suggesting here is that English teachers ought to be judicious about when and how often to share their interpretations; otherwise, their interpretations risk being perceived as "truth" rather than as just another interpretation to be judged alongside all the others. Daniel argues that by being overly forthcoming, he would discourage alternate interpretations and contradict the idea that texts can support multiple interpretations simultaneously. By stepping back, Daniel theoretically opens up interpretive space for his students.

In my introduction to this chapter, I note that the teachers' goal of sharing authority follows naturally from their respect for students—i.e., since they respect what students have to say, they strive to lift up their students' contributions. Daniel's rationale for minimizing his talking during discussions, as explained above, suggests that his epistemological and disciplinary commitments also necessitate supporting students' interpretive authority. As he sees it, it is an important disciplinary goal to disabuse students of the notion that "there's one interpretation." It is essential, then, that his students learn to hear his voice as just another voice—as his juniors and seniors seem to—rather than as the final authority on whatever is being discussed. Here Daniel elaborates on how his epistemological and disciplinary commitments shape his pedagogy:

> Literature is about interpretation, and so what I'm really trying to do is force them to listen to other people's interpretations and come up with their own, because that's really how we teach the learning process. Instead of me just saying, here's what this book is about. And so I really want to create a space where they can

play and attempt to come up with meaning themselves. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

The work of doing English, as Daniel sees it, is reading and interpreting. And though this means listening to other people's interpretations, it does not mean simply memorizing and repeating some authoritative interpretation (e.g., the teacher's or the literary critic's). It means doing the work of interpretation themselves. Kathleen echoed this orientation:

> So I like to leave [discussions] open to let the kids find their own way, because we can, as teachers, stand up there and show them, "This is what you have to be thinking about," but nobody does that, do you know what I mean? Like, you have to let them think and find their own way to get meaning from it. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

Like Daniel, Kathleen believes the most educationally beneficial move is to get students to do the work of interpretation. Rather than telling them or steering them towards her interpretation of the text (or some commonly agreed-upon interpretation), she makes a case for providing students with opportunities to "think and find their own way." Implied in such an approach to teaching literature is the belief that a text might hold different meanings for different students.

Kevin points to another important justification for reducing the teacher's interpretive footprint and, relatedly, encouraging students to look to one another for valuable insight:

> When ideas are brought out in the open, other kids who didn't know what they were thinking about or didn't know how to process a piece of literature or work on an essay or whatever, when they hear people talking about it, that helps them a

lot because then they hear ideas and it's not just they're kind of struggling by themselves. It's like, "Oh, I didn't think of that." (Kevin, Preliminary Interview)

Kevin argues that discussions support students in developing their interpretive skills as they get to hear other students talk through their interpretations. It is hard to read these words without thinking about Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development." Since teachers, theoretically, have more experience interpreting texts, and, potentially, are not encountering the text under discussion for the first time, their interpretations may arrive more fully formed, which is to say, the interpretive moves the teacher made to arrive at a particular interpretation may be invisible to students. Put slightly differently, there is a risk that the teacher's interpretations, especially if they are more developed, will be outside the students' zone of proximal development and, therefore, will not help students learn how to do the work of interpretation themselves. Certainly a teacher might mitigate this risk by talking students through (i.e. modeling) their interpretive moves, and at some point, the teacher must be held responsible for teaching students how to interpret a text (more on this later). But Kevin seems to be arguing here that listening to one's peers' interpretations is useful because, from a developmental perspective, they tend to be more accessible and easier to learn from.

Needless to say, the picture that Kevin paints above of students talking and listening to one another cannot just be wished into existence. If it were that easy to accomplish, we would likely see more of it. Sara identifies students' prior learning experiences as a significant barrier:

I think that students don't really have any practice with discussions that aren't totally hosted by the teacher. When they make their contribution, they look at me.

> Doesn't matter where I'm standing, they look at me. I think that they don't know how to talk to each other. (Sara, Preliminary Interview)

By the time students arrive in 10th grade, they have been on the receiving end of ten plus of years of training in how to behave in a classroom that, for the most part, have reinforced the centrality of the teacher. Such habits of mind, Sara contends, die hard. A teacher cannot just decide, "Okay, I'm going to have a dialogic classroom today," and expect students to override their (predominantly monologic) training and suddenly engage one another in productive academic discussion. Teachers have to take direct action to both diminish their own centrality and challenge students' internalized ideas about knowledge and power.

The teachers in this study suggest that one way to do this is to make discussion commonplace. In Kevin's class, discussions are often impromptu. An idea comes up in one of the students' reflections, another student has a reaction to that idea, Kevin probes the student's reaction, and the discussion picks up from there (or it doesn't and Kevin continues with the reflections). These kinds of impromptu discussions were not a daily occurrence, but they happened enough for me to quickly perceive them as a pattern. Many of these discussions were not about ELA content, or at least content that would be easily recognizable as such, but Kevin argued they serve an important pedagogical purpose nonetheless:

> I like to think that anytime that there's an opportunity for us to interact and talk with each other, that's good. You know, I want students comfortable enough to talk because I think if you only allocate certain spaces for them, then they get

> used to not talking, and when you do allocate the space, they're not prepared to talk. (Kevin, Stimulated Recall)

Kevin sees his entire class as "for them," as a space where he hopes students will speak what's on their mind and in their hearts. To confine them to demarcated spaces would send a mixed message about their relative autonomy vis-à-vis the teacher and about who generates the intellectual content of the class. It would be like saying, "Usually, I want you to listen respectfully to me. But today I want you to do the intellectual heavy lifting." Additionally, Kevin argues that restricting discussion to certain spaces would get students out of the habit of speaking, or, depending on their prior educational experiences, reinforce old habits. By opening up his classroom to impromptu discussions, Kevin cedes a significant amount of control over what discussions are about *and* when they happen.

Kathleen maintains a slightly tighter hold on the dialogic space in her classroom. However, it remains true that the students' talking in her class is not relegated to just a few select spaces; rather, student talk happens throughout. Sometimes this is just students reacting out loud to the story or to a question Kathleen asks. Other times, she uses talk as a way to prime students for some reading they are about to do together or to quickly reflect on what they just read. For example, she might ask a question like, "Why might Maya be afraid to move to California?" or "What are the differences between California and Arkansas, especially during this time?" and take three or four student responses. These exchanges are quick and do not achieve much interpretive depth, but they do maintain an ongoing two-way conversation, so that students are never taken by surprise when it is their turn to talk.

Daniel touches upon a similar theme:

> …you need to be thinking about discussion in terms of, you know, "I'm going to be doing this every couple weeks for nine months," not "I'm doing a discussion, one discussion with this unit." That doesn't help. It's got to be, discussion has to be something that grows and builds over years. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

Discussion—and its corresponding transfer of intellectual responsibility from teacher to students—is not something a teacher can turn on and off as he/she desires. For it to work, teachers must commit considerable time and energy to its ongoing maintenance. And, in fact, the commitment that Daniel gestures towards in this quote—"every couple weeks for nine months"—pales in comparison to his actual commitment. It was a rare day that passed without some form of discussion. His midterm exam *was* a discussion, a signal to his students of the importance of discussion, and, on his part, a doubling down on the academic value of the work of discussions.

Emblematic of Sara's commitment to shared authority is the authority she grants to the writer during monthly writer's workshops. During these workshops, students are discouraged from telling the writer what to do. This includes giving feedback that begins with phrases like, "You should…" or "You need to fix…" When I pressed down on this rule, suggesting that maybe sometimes a student really "should" fix something in their writing, Sara elaborated on her thinking:

> I think that my opposition to that is, like, taking this authority on yourself as like, "I know how to fix your paper."…I'd rather have that authority taken away from [the readers], to let the writer make those decisions, even if it means phrasing some things like, "I wonder."…Because there are not very many issues that are black-and-white correct/incorrect, and even an English teacher doesn't have that

> blanket authority to tell you, like, you much change this, this is for sure wrong, so even I don't try to use it very often. If I do, I say, "It's definitely an error. You gotta fix it." I want them to be able to make decisions about their writing based on feedback and that means choosing what to adopt and what to change and what not to change. (Sara, Stimulated Recall)

The context of Sara's class makes this commitment even more remarkable. These are all students who have been identified as struggling writers, a fact that might have compelled some teachers to disregard or suspend their authority as writers. Yet, Sara perceives these students as no less deserving of the discretion that authorship entails. At the same time, it's important to note that she still feels a responsibility to correct outright errors, which she distinguishes from stylistic choices. Sara's students internalized this positioning towards the writer, as illustrated by their behavior during the workshops and by one student's comment during the focus group: "To help someone out is okay, but trying to change their work and make it into your words, that's not okay." Sara's insistence on the writer's authority (without entirely relinquishing her own) is perhaps a small detail—and not directly related to discussions per se—but it is exemplary of the way she attempts to empower her students' intellectual agency and of the way students pick up on that positioning.

Representing an extreme version of shared authority are Daniel's "graded discussions." In these discussions, which happen, on average, once or twice a month, Daniel doesn't talk at all. He stands at the board, keeping track of who has spoken and recording students' comments. His face and body language communicate that he is listening but do not reveal what he is thinking. This means that if students are looking for

validation or for a sign that they've been understood, they need to look to their peers. Daniel's decision to remove his voice from the graded discussions—aside from sometimes posing the opening question—grew out of a recognition that he has a tendency to talk too much during discussions:

> So I started off with this really kind of pure Socratic, and then I didn't like it because I was participating too much and I was asking too many guiding questions. It was just too easy to say, "What do you guys think about this line?" And then all of them know, like, oh, that's an important line. So they didn't find it themselves. I still had to give that to them. So…I started looking for ways to get me out of the discussion, and I think that's the crucial thing, is that you have to immediately get out of that discussion. Let them and trust them.

By "get[ting] out of the discussion" for an hour, Daniel places a tremendous amount of trust in his students' ability to fill that hour with generative intellectual content. It also ensures that his ideas do not over overshadow or crowd out his students' ideas. This approach to discussion—which is supported by almost daily teacher-led discussions—grants students a great deal of authority. In effect, it says, "You don't need me to have a substantive discussion about a text. You can do it yourselves."

Daniel acknowledged that there was a cost to removing himself from the discussion, but concluded that the benefits outweighed the cost:

> I guess there is a cost in terms of, sometimes we don't spend enough time on the traditional interpretation because they're coming up with interpretations, but, honestly, the traditional interpretation is nothing. We don't need it. The fact that Gatsby is often seen in this light really doesn't matter as long as they are coming

> up with well-evidenced ideas of their own because it's the process that we need to teach, you know, ultimately. It doesn't really matter much what Fitzgerald said about the world 100 years ago. What matters is we're teaching them this process by which to interpret and to analyze. And I feel like the graded discussion removes my influence a lot more, and I feel like that's important, because they need the ability to kind of do that themselves. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

The statement "It doesn't really matter much what Fitzgerald said about the world 100 years ago" is a pretty radical reimagining of the goals for a high school English class. There are, no doubt, many teachers who would say that this is precisely why we read *The Great Gatsby*, to learn what F. Scott Fitzgerald had to say about American society in the 1920s. Daniel, on the other hand, privileges the interpretive process over any specific "expert" interpretation. To him, it is far less important for students to learn some widely accepted interpretation of Fitzgerald's intended meaning than for them to practice developing and supporting their own interpretations. At the same time, Daniel is talking specifically about the graded discussions here, not the more frequent teacher-led discussions that happen in his class. In these teacher-led discussions—one of which I describe in detail later in this chapter—Daniel provides a great deal of support, including pointing students towards traditional interpretations (e.g., the symbolism of the green light).

Indeed, as Daniel's comment above suggests, there is a tension between "get[ting] out of the discussion"—and, thus, minimizing the teacher-generated parts of the discussion—and making sure the discussion stays focused on learning goals. Sara described how she sometimes feels pulled between letting students run discussions and

interjecting with ideas or directions that she perceives as especially important. In this case, she's talking about writer's workshops, but the tension she describes might apply to discussions more broadly:

> Sometimes I really do have feedback for the writer that [his/her peers] are not saying, and I think it's important enough, or they're going to miss it, that I need to say it. But I try not to do that as often because I don't want to be the right answer, or the, like, "you get to have the final word on my piece," because I do get to…talk to the writer individually and privately about their piece. (Sara, Stimulated Recall)

Sara describes a difficult tightrope for dialogic teachers to walk. On the one hand, she doesn't want to push out the student voices, to render their voices as secondary to her own. Even if she bites her tongue for the majority of the discussion and comes in at the very end, she risks usurping what has been said already and becoming, as she says, "the final word." And, yet, sometimes, there are important ideas that aren't being said by the students, and that, in this case, the student who is having his/her piece workshopped needs to hear, and, it could be argued, the other students would benefit from hearing as well. What then? Sara makes the case here for *sometimes* saying those ideas, but with the realization that *always* saying those ideas will undercut her efforts to share authority with her students, effectively reinforcing the teacher's role as, to use Daniel's words, "arbiter of right and wrong."

Daniel's students' collective description of the teacher's ideal role in a discussion also contained this tension. They praised student-generated discussions but maintained that discussions benefit from a teacher's guiding hand:

S1: I think if the discussion gets way too out of hand, then, like, the teacher can put it back on track, but, I mean, it shouldn't be the teacher saying, "Here's the --." It should be more like the students are kind of like talking and the teacher can pitch in if they feel like they have something to say or if they feel like the discussion is going way out of the focus of whatever it is.

S2: Or to help move the discussion forward if the discussion is just going in circles.

S3: And I also feel like as kids we tend to, we try to follow the thinking of adults, and by not putting yourself as, like, by not stating your opinion as a teacher, that keeps an open mind all around.

S4: I like it when teachers highlight points that are made that they really like and they sort of walk us through how we got there. They just paraphrase what the student said to make it sort of more clear, and make clear the thought process that they went through, which helps others in our analyzation [sic] as well. (Student Focus Group)

On the one hand, Daniel's students want their teachers to step in and put the discussion back on track if it loses the thread or to nudge it in a more productive direction if the discussion isn't getting anywhere. On the other hand, they don't want their teachers to hijack a discussion by doing the difficult interpretive work for them, or by reducing the multiplicity of interpretations to one final answer. In other words, they describe a desire for teachers to direct the conversation when necessary—to maintain at least some facilitative authority—without usurping students' interpretive authority. Interestingly, Student 4 suggests that teachers might direct students' learning with some strategic play-

by-play calling of the discussion. The teacher moves he describes—highlighting key points, retracing the thread of the conversation, making interpretive moves explicit—are essentially a kind of oral annotation of the discussion. By explicitly interpreting the discussion for everyone to hear, the teacher is able to exert control over what students take away from the discussion. Student 4's comment is a slight addendum to Kevin's observation (quoted earlier in this chapter) that discussions give students an opportunity to learn from one another. While that may be true, it is also true that teachers can influence what and how much students learn from one another.

As I note in the introduction to this chapter, none of the teachers in this study abdicate their authority entirely. Even Daniel's graded discussions, which are a way for Daniel to, as he says, "remove his influence," bear his imprint in the sense that they are supported by a number of rules—rules designed and enforced by Daniel. Students must speak three times to get full credit. To get credit for a comment, they must say something "new"—an idea that hasn't been said yet. If everyone in the class speaks three times, the entire class gets extra credit. In effect, these rules structure the dialogic space; they incentivize the kind of student behavior that he desires. That said, the rules perform a mostly facilitative function,[20] which is to say they are designed to keep the discussion from going too far astray or from petering out, all the while enabling Daniel to keep his voice out of the discussion until the very end. The students' interpretive autonomy is supported by the facilitative structures that Daniel puts into place.

Sara's writer's workshops walk a similar line between structure and freedom. To be sure, the goals of a writer's workshop differ from those of a literature discussion in

[20] They also distribute some facilitative authority to students as students must call on one another (although the extra credit incentive may exert some control over *how* students do that, particularly towards the end of the discussion).

important ways, and bring with them a different set of pedagogical considerations. At the same time, they might still be fairly judged by the criteria for a good discussion that I lay out in Chapter 2 (*Were they student-generated? Focused on learning goals? Coherent? Respectful?*). Moreover, as discussions, they are an important piece of the discursive and communal context in which Sara's literature discussions occur. Although Sara does not seek to remove her voice from the workshops completely a la Daniel's graded discussions, she does seek to minimize her presence and support students in taking ownership of the dialogic space. To this end, she doesn't lead the workshops; her students do. This freedom is constrained by a four-part format that Sara developed to structure the workshops: (1) big (positive) impressions, (2) specific (positive) impressions, (3) questions, and (4) things they are wondering. Additionally, Sara provides sentence starters for each of the four parts, although students don't have to use the sentence starters.

This all makes for a relatively tightly constrained discussion, especially initially when students are learning the format. Though Sara's students expressed that they understood the rationale for the structured workshop format, they also intimated that, in general, discussion rules have a tendency to artificialize a discussion. Nevertheless, the clearly laid out structure permits Sara to take a step back. Instead of facilitating the discussion's movement from part to part, the students take on the facilitation responsibilities, allowing Sara to behave as just another reader. Unlike Daniel's graded discussions, the workshop structure does, in fact, dictate some of the intellectual terrain. The four-part format and the kinds of feedback that Sara classifies as "not helpful" establish boundaries for what can be said and when it can be said. In addition, by

providing sentence starters, Sara offers some helpful support for students, but also risks limiting the terrain to only those starters. Within these boundaries, however, students generate the intellectual content, in the sense that they decide what parts of their peers' writing they want to spend time on. I describe these workshops in detail because they are such a clear expression of the push-pull relationship between student autonomy and teacher guidance that shows up time and time again in the data. This prevalence suggests that a teacher's ability to manage this relationship might be at the heart of dialogic teaching.

Kevin adds another layer of complexity to what it looks like in practice for a teacher to share authority with students. Like Kathleen (as described in Chapter 4), Kevin does not shy away from sensitive topics in class discussions. I observed discussions about the 2016 presidential primaries, meninism versus feminism, and how to address racist/homophobic epithets when they are used in a text (e.g., Should Kevin say the words "nigger" and "fag" when he is reading aloud from a text or should he use "n-word"/"f-word" instead? Should he treat these two words the same way? Who is "permitted" to use these words more broadly?). Since these discussions arose organically from the reflections, Kevin did not plan to have these discussions. One of the challenges of discussing sensitive topics, of course, is the possibility that a student might make a comment that is offensive or insensitive. Kevin's description of how he responds to such comments provides a nice instantiation of the tension between student autonomy and teacher guidance:

> I think it's hopefully going to be more effective to try to talk to someone in a way that you're trying to reach out to them and trying to convince--or just like explain,

> you know, and educate, *and that's my job more than it is other students' job* [emphasis added]. I think there's teachers who would say, "Well, you're the gay person. Explain why that's offensive," and I don't think that's fair. I feel like that is actually my job. (Kevin, Stimulated Recall)

The fact that these discussions even happen is a testament to one way in which Kevin aspires to share authority with his students. For those minutes, the curriculum is whatever is on students' minds; it is what *they* want to talk about. And, yet, in the case of a student making an offensive comment, Kevin argues that it is the teacher's job to reclaim his/her authority and to address the comment. To abdicate authority in this moment, to expect students to do the hard work of challenging a peer's racism or homophobia or sexism, would be, as Kevin's comment suggests, a dereliction of duty. This is not to say that he believes students *can't* do that work, but that they should not be expected to do it. In Kevin's mind, there are goals that take precedence over the goal of sharing authority with students, and making sure that no student feels a burden to defend his/her identity to his/her peers is one of those goals.

During the discussion about the politics of words like the n-word, Kevin retained especially tight control of the discussion. Unlike other discussions where Kevin was more likely to conceal his own opinions, he was very forthcoming during this discussion, to the point of soliloquizing on a few occasions. When some doubt arose in a couple of White students' comments about whether it was okay for Black people to use the n-word, Kevin intervened:

> I think the school of thought is, any group, if a term has been used to insult or dehumanize that group, if that group wants to adapt that term in its own way, for

> its own understanding, that's not for other people to say whether or not they can do it. So for me, you know, my son's name is Julius. So sometimes if we're joking with him, we'll call him "Little Jew." [Lots of laughing.] But we're Jewish! So, like, we understand the context and why it's okay for us to say that to each other and there's nothing threatening about it, right? But if somebody else who's not Jewish or even probably in my family was like, "Hey, Little Jew," I'd be like, "Whoa." Right? So I feel like that's kinda similar. I feel like for me, I won't say the n-word, but if people who are African-American want to say it, I don't think it's up to me to say, hey, you shouldn't say it either. But I feel like, I can say that to another White person—"Don't say that." Because White people have used that word to dehumanize and insult, like we were talking about with "Piggy" yesterday. (Kevin, 3/31/16)

This contribution is triple the length of any student contribution made during the discussion. So just in terms of pure quantity, Kevin is veering in the direction of monologue. He begins by establishing a governing principle about who gets to have a say in how certain words are used. Then he tells a personal anecdote that manages to a) command the class's attention by injecting a little lightness into the discussion (see the laughter), and b) exemplify the governing principle. Then he shows how the principle directs his behavior and attitudes with regards to the n-word. Finally, he connects these ideas to the book they're reading. In this situation, Kevin uses his authority to ensure that some very important ideas about race and language are heard loud and clear, and that none of the Black students feel a burden to challenge the thinking of their White classmates who, importantly, compose the majority of the class. And he does this in a

way that avoids directly confronting or publicly shaming the White students who made the initial comments. His authority, however, is not such that his students take his comment as the final word on the matter. The next student to speak (who is White) pushes back on Kevin's argument: "I heard the same thing about using 'queer' as an insult. I was just wondering, can you really reclaim a word like that?"

This question about when should teachers hang back and when should they speak up, particularly as it pertains to intellectual authority, is a tricky one. Even consider the issue of praise. When should teachers offer praise for a student's contribution? On the one hand, it's possible to interpret praise as a teacher asserting his/her authority—the ruler deigning to acknowledge the peasant's good work. That might sound extreme, but it speaks to the way in which authority is implied in praise: "I can tell you that what you said is good because I know what is good." In addition, students may overvalue student contributions that receive the teacher's seal of approval. Kathleen, on the other hand, offers the following rationale for giving praise.

> Whenever I have a student respond to a quote….I always try to praise the student for thinking and sharing his/her thoughts. So often students fear rejection in the classroom, yet they have great, insightful thoughts. My goal is to respect their thoughts and model that in front of the other students so they know that I will never reject their thought process. This helps to create a comfortable, respectful learning environment. (Kathleen, Stimulated Recall)

Kathleen identifies students' fear of rejection as an obstacle to participation, and, by extension, an obstacle to students taking on more responsibility as thinkers and meaning-makers. In response, she strives to reassure them that their ideas will be received

respectfully. Kathleen's emphasis on "comfort" and "respect" is perhaps not so surprising given that relationship- and trust-building are at the center of her pedagogy. Like Kevin, Kathleen identifies a goal that she must balance with the goal of sharing authority with students. To establish a "comfortable, respectful" environment, Kathleen leverages her authority by publicly validating the students' responses. All of this supports the notion that inverting traditional power dynamics is not an absolute condition in a dialogic classroom, but is, in practice, improvisational and dynamic, or, to use an analogy, a kind of dance that sometimes the teacher leads and sometimes the students lead.

Kathleen's students had some interesting insights into this dance. One of the things they appreciate about Kathleen is that she doesn't play a purely facilitative role during discussions, but, rather, interjects sometimes with her own opinions:

> **S1:** And for some teachers, they don't, like, voice their opinions. They'll just ask for the students' opinions, but [Kathleen], she voices her opinion about everything that we've been doing in class.
>
> **AB:** Do you like that?
>
> **S1&S2:** Yeah.
>
> **S1:** It's nice having an actual conversation instead of just, "I'm the teacher, you're the students. You have to listen to what I say and learn and that's it." She makes it interesting, I guess.
>
> **AB:** Why do you think it's good that she brings in her opinions, because another thing that she could do is just stand back and call on people and make sure that people are listening, but she's also occasionally saying her own ideas.
>
> **S2:** Because it makes us think.

S1: Yeah.

S3: It shows her opinion too. Like, saying, she has a feeling on this too. She's not just making us do it. (Student Focus Group)

The students make the case here that discussions in Kathleen's class feel like an "actual conversation" *because* she weighs in with his/her own ideas and opinions. Otherwise, Student 3 explains, it would feel like Kathleen was "just making [them] do it." To their thinking, Kathleen's willingness to share her opinions is indicative of a more equal power dynamic, whereas if she were to keep her opinions to herself, it would be a reminder that she is the teacher and they are completing a task that she assigned. Students, after all, don't have the liberty to keep their opinions to themselves. At some point, if they are going to do the work of the class, they have to share their ideas in some form, verbal or otherwise. A teacher's silence, then, from this perspective, might be experienced by students as an demonstration of power. Kathleen, on the other hand, thinks and reacts alongside her students. Moreover, by sharing her opinions, she can, as one student remarks, "make [them] think." Though the student does not elaborate, it seems that this would be an opportunity for Kathleen to make them think, specifically, about ideas that she perceives as critical to their understanding of the text or topic, or, in other words, to steer the discussion towards learning goals. These comments by Kathleen's students challenge the idea that sharing authority with students is merely a matter of getting one's voice out of the discussion. In fact, they suggest that doing so might actually reinforce the balance of authority.

Daniel's students offered more insight into the teacher's role during discussions. When the descriptor "student-led" kept coming up during the focus group, I pressed down on what they meant, resulting in the following exchange:

> **S1:** [At this school] they don't really, the teachers don't really get involved with the discussions that we have. They let us run it, they let us do our own thing.
>
> **S2:** Yeah, I like that also. Before the discussions, the teachers always, like, give us, you know, their insight and analyzations [sic] of the text, but once it comes time for the discussion, they usually step back, which is really nice because it creates this environment that really welcomes other perspectives and there's really, like, no wrong answer.
>
> **S3:** Yeah, and when they do put their insight in, it's not as a teacher, it's as a reader.
>
> **AB:** So what's the difference between those two things, inserting themselves as a teacher versus as a reader?
>
> **S3:** Um, cause I feel like teachers are trying to lead you somewhere whereas a reader is on the same page as you, like you guys are seeing the same things, you guys have read the same lines. (Student Focus Group)

The students begin by asserting that it's important for teachers to take a step back during discussions. When teachers do contribute, they continue, it's preferable for them to do so not as a teacher but as a fellow reader. This distinction between teacher and reader is a subtle one, and, I think, strikes right at the heart of what it means for teachers to share authority with their students. I interpret Student 3 to mean that rather than leading students through a text—which implies having a specific destination in mind—teachers

should travel through it alongside their students, participating in the discussion, but not asserting a rigid agenda. This signals a subtle shift in positioning (with regards to their students and to the text) that teachers must make in order for students to truly believe that their ideas carry the same authority as their teacher's ideas. I also don't want to rush past Student 2's description of what teachers do *before* the discussion. It seems reasonable to assume that the teachers' pre-discussion insights and analysis—if skillfully communicated—would have influence on the discussion(s) to come, potentially increasing the possibility that students take up the text in more purposeful and/or intellectually rigorous ways.

"My lessons are pretty well planned, but what I'm really good at is throwing that out the window completely when something more interesting shows up": Sharing Intellectual Authority in Action

The picture of shared intellectual authority that emerges from the above analysis is one that resists hard dichotomies of classroom discourse: e.g., monologic vs. dialogic; teacher-directed vs. student-generated; closed vs. open. Instead of "versus," the teachers and students in this study describe "and." They maintain that the goals of dialogism in a secondary ELA context require that students be supported in developing and articulating their own ideas about a text or topic. This means providing them with the interpretive and curricular space to do so. At the same time, there are other important goals—academic and otherwise—that assert their urgency and must be attended to by the teacher, sometimes at the expense of dialogism, or at least at the expense of a dialogism narrowly defined. This necessitates, as Kathleen's description of giving praise prompts me to suggest above, a kind of dance in which teacher and students take turns leading. If a

teacher is too heavy-handed in his/her direction of a discussion, he/she risks stripping students of their interpretive authority. If a teacher is too off-hands, he/she risks letting the discussion go in a direction that is less educationally productive. In the following paragraphs, I provide an account of how one teacher, Daniel, manages this balance over the course of a single (teacher-led) discussion.

The first thing to note about this discussion (see Appendix D for a complete transcript) is that Daniel enters with a plan, albeit a loose one. He has an opening question ("Was Myrtle's death [in *The Great Gatsby*] an accident or intentional?"), some ideas he wants to suggest about the unreliability of the narration, and a couple of passages he wants students to look at more closely (the description of Myrtle's death and the description of Gatsby's death). In other words, he enters the discussion with some specific learning goals. He also narrows the terrain substantially. He doesn't just say, "Okay, *The Great Gatsby*. Chapters 7 and 8. Discuss." He begins by asking a question that supports multiple interpretations, and picks out two passages that he thinks are particularly rich territory for interpretive work. Coexisting with his more specific goals are his goals for discussion more generally:

> By hearing other people explain their thinking, by trying to explain their thinking themselves, and having that explanation work or not work, they really learn how to kind of take this feeling that there's something going on [in the text] and really extrapolate it out and explain it logically into something that's a lot more akin to technical analysis….Instead of me giving one interpretation, we have 30 people in the classroom. They hear 30 interpretations, and then they're really able to see the variety and scope of what we can do with literature. And every time they find out

something new that we can do, it opens their mind for everything they read from then on. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

Already we can see some of the ways in which Daniel is trying to strike a balance between directing the discussion in ways that he perceives as educationally valuable and empowering students' interpretive authority. He has an agenda for the discussion, but that agenda is not so narrow as to do all of the interpretive work for students. Yes, he does the work of identifying Myrtle's death as a significant moment in the text and of asking a few important questions of that moment. But there remains a great deal of interpretive possibility. Moreover, his goal is not that students arrive at his interpretation of the text, but that, collectively and individually, they arrive at their own interpretations.

Daniel opens the discussion by asking students to share their responses to the journal prompt, "Was Myrtle's death an accident or intentional?" For the first six minutes of the discussion, Daniel barely says a word, in stark contrast to his naturally talkative demeanor. He even seems to avoid using his voice to call on students, choosing to nod in their direction instead. This intentional quietness marks the transition into discussion, signaling to students that he is making space for them. Note that I do not say the space is fully theirs. Daniel remains at the center, both because of his physical placement in front of the class and because he asked the question the students are all answering. Notably, Daniel refrains from answering the question himself; students never learn whether he thinks Myrtle's death was an accident or intentional. Nor does he comment directly on their answers to the question.

When Daniel does finally speak six minutes into the discussion, it is to ask a series of questions intended to cast doubt on Gatsby's account of Myrtle's death: "Who

was driving the car? How do you know? Is [the fact that Gatsby said Daisy was driving] a problem? Why?" The purpose of this line of questioning is to suggest to students that since Gatsby may have had good reason to lie to Nick about who was driving the car, it is impossible to know for certain what happened. The fact that this line of questioning has such a clear purpose suggests that it is not as open-ended as, say, his question about whether Myrtle's death was an accident or intentional. There is a clear answer to his questions, which is that Gatsby's word cannot be trusted. If the students had not provided this answer, I suspect he would have provided it. In effect, this brief exchange veers into discourse that is slightly more teacher-centered in nature, which is to say, discourse that might be said to impede on students' interpretive authority. However, this choice on Daniel's part can be justified by noting that any examination of fault in Myrtle's death should consider the fact that some of the circumstances around her death are murky, and since the students did not interrogate Gatsby's account on their own, Daniel needed to lead them there.[21]

Moreover, it is simply good reading to ask of a text, "How do we know what we know?" or, more specifically, "Can we trust this narrator?" Daniel is, in essence, modeling good reading. In short, what we see here is some very purposeful teacher talk that, ultimately, supports the dialogism, as it opens up the discussion in new directions and communicates an important reading strategy that students might apply later in their analysis. Later, during the same part of the discussion, we find this exchange:

[21] It is possible they would have gotten there on their own eventually, but perhaps Daniel had other important goals he wanted to accomplish with that time.

Daniel: We're talking about can we even trust Gatsby with this conversation. But there's another question. Can we even trust Nick? Nick is the one telling us this story.

S1: Can we even trust [F. Scott] Fitzgerald?

Daniel: Can we even trust Fitzgerald? I think we can always trust Fitzgerald. Because he's not lying about crafting this as fiction.

Here again, Daniel assumes a much more authoritative role. He introduces the idea that Nick represents yet another layer of unreliability, but balks at the notion that F. Scott Fitzgerald might also be unreliable. Since Daniel's approach to reading texts is, at its heart, about discerning the author's intention, it is crucial to assume that the author's choices have meaning and are not just meant to mislead the reader. Although the tone with which he repeats the student's question—"Can we even trust Fitzgerald?"—communicates that he likes this question very much, he also takes it upon himself to quickly reject this idea, as it could lead to some unproductive spinning of the wheels (e.g., *If Fitzgerald is lying about Gatsby lying, then who can we believe?)*. It is another moment where Daniel's discourse shifts into a mode that appears monologic, but is ultimately in service of the immediate discussion.

At this point in the discussion, Daniel transitions into reading Myrtle's death scene aloud. He asks, "It's a really graphic death. [Fitzgerald] describes it brutally. Why?" He takes a couple of responses, paraphrasing them in ways that highlight their power and insight (more on this strategy in Chapter 6). Again, he refrains from answering the question himself or providing commentary on the students' responses besides a simple "Good." Eventually, one student, Ruby, shares some very skillful analysis about

how Myrtle's broken body—her chest ripped open and her heart left literally exposed to onlookers—is a metaphor for her relationship with the much wealthier and more powerful Tom. However, Ruby takes a long time to fully articulate her idea, and, as Daniel explains to me later, he becomes worried that other students are checking out:

> What Ruby is talking about is great and beautiful, but after a couple minutes of thinking out loud like that, I start to lose other people. So I need to redirect. And, of course, I don't want to redirect in a way where Ruby feels like she's being punished, so by me being able to say, "Yes, here's a whole other question," instead of feeling like she's been cut off, Ruby feels like she's had almost a definitive answer. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

There are a couple of goals competing for Daniel's attention here. He wants to get the rest of the class involved again, but he doesn't want to make Ruby feel censured or interrupted. His solution is to move the discussion in an almost totally new direction, to draw students' attention to the fact that the car that kills Myrtle is mistakenly described by an eyewitness as green, a detail that inevitably invokes the symbolism of the green light that Gatsby stares at across the bay. What, he wonders aloud, is the connection here? Going back to a distinction I make earlier in this chapter between facilitative and interpretive authority, Daniel leverages a bit of both here. In terms of facilitation, he recognizes that Ruby is beginning to dominate and he steps in to open the conversation back up. But he also adds new interpretive material to the discussion by directing students to the "green" car/green light connection, a connection they might not have made themselves.

Daniel's abrupt shift is not a total departure from Ruby's comment. She was attributing metaphorical meaning to Myrtle's death, and Daniel invites students to do a similar kind of metaphorical analysis. Recall that Daniel originally intended to look at both Myrtle's and Gatsby's death scenes, an exercise that would have prompted students to consider why Fitzgerald renders their deaths in such different styles. But he abandons this part of his plan, choosing instead to follow Ruby's line of thinking, if indirectly:

> Ruby has this beautiful "chest ripped open" love metaphor and she explains it beautifully and we're able to just go off on that and it's a great point. It's a great lesson in literary analysis, and it's not one that I was necessarily expecting, but it's one that I can pick up and go with in a really more organic way, which for me, is the best option….My lessons are pretty well planned, but what I'm really good at is throwing that out the window completely when something more interesting shows up. So I have a plan, but then something more interesting has shown up, and I'm gonna kind of throw it out the window and go with that. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

This willingness to revise his plan on the fly is indicative of Daniel's deference to his students' ideas. He could have clung to his original plan, and perhaps that's what a novice teacher would've done. Instead, he identifies a new direction for the discussion based on what the students are saying. Since Ruby has so thoroughly and convincingly provided an example of how to identify metaphor, Daniel decides to prompt students to apply that kind of analysis to the "green" car/ green light. Ruby's comment provides him with an educational opportunity and he takes it. By abandoning one of his intended goals—comparing the diction of the two death scenes—he stays true, in fact, truer to his

larger set of goals for the discussion—facilitating, as opposed to dictating, students' interpretations of the text. He concludes the discussion by pointing out that what they've been talking about is allegory despite the fact that they never used that name.

Daniel remains central to the discussion throughout—he sets the boundaries, identifies key moments, moves the discussion along, distributes participation, etc.—but without his ideas being central. It is his students' ideas that compose the meat of the discussion. There is more to say about Daniel's moves during this discussion, but for the purposes of this chapter, I hope that this up-close look at a single discussion has illuminated how a teacher might strike a workable balance between sharing authority with students and activating his/her own authority when necessary.

"I just don't like to run a classroom as if it's a space of confinement": Physical Authority

In addition to sharing intellectual authority with students, the teachers in this study share physical authority with students as well. I use the term "physical authority" to refer to control over students' bodies and voices. Though I did witness the teachers do and say things that would fall into the category of classroom management, the participating teachers were not interested in overtly policing or surveilling their students—in fact, they intentionally avoided treating their students like subjects to be controlled. In the following paragraphs, I provide instantiations of the teachers' humane approaches to classroom management.

None of the participating teachers treated noise as innately bad. In particular, Kevin's and Kathleen's classes could be loud, though it should also be said that they were

the larger of the four classes. When I asked Kathleen to describe the feel and environment that she strives to create in her room, she answered:

> Comfortable. Comfortable but--I wanted to say organized chaos, but I don't think my room is chaotic. Sometimes it is, like with the brainstorming out loud. That was maybe chaotic for some teachers; they don't like all that. But, again, I was trying to model brainstorming and that's what happens. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

The term "organized chaos," of course, is an oxymoron. Chaos implies lack of organization. But I suspect that what Kathleen is trying to capture in this expression is the distance between how her room might sometimes appear to an outsider and her perception of how it actually is. A noisy room of students talking out-of-turn is not what most people picture when they think of a classroom that supports student learning. Kathleen, on the other hand, argues that it is, in fact, a necessary feature of student learning:

> When I know I'm going to say something that's going to cause a reaction, I give them twenty seconds, let them get it out, thirty seconds, because I know it's on topic, because they're all just having a reaction, an instant reaction to what I said. After so long, though, it can get off topic, so then you gotta reel 'em in and say, "Okay now let's talk about it as a class. Let's raise our hands and share our thoughts," and that's, you know, when we share. But you got to let them have that moment, because a lot of good things can happen in those twenty seconds. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

Whereas some teachers go to drastic ends to reduce opportunities for moments of "chaos," Kathleen intentionally creates opportunities for students to talk in less regulated and more natural ways. This talking, she believes, is a natural outcome of students earnestly and personally engaging with content. In her mind, it's going to happen anyway—that is, if the question she asks hits a nerve—and so why police her students' desire to have an out loud reaction?

This philosophy towards student talking extends to individual students talking out of turn. Kathleen does not believe in punishing students for their exuberance. This does not mean that she doesn't have rules to govern student talking. With the exception of the brainstorms that she describes above, she tries to insist on students raising their hands and speaking one at a time. But not every student is equally well served by that rule, at least when it's strictly enforced. Here Kathleen discusses her approach to working with Demetrius, a particularly talkative student.

> I have a student, Demetrius, who just loves to talk, loves to hear himself talk. He's one I have to give constant reminders with: "Demetrius, I want to hear what you have to say, but if you blurt it out, I don't get to hear it because I'm listening to somebody else." So it's the way you approach them with it, you know, where some teachers might just be like, "Demetrius, get out of the room," or some people might be like, "Demetrius, you're not allowed to talk anymore," you know, but when you approach it like that [I presume she means, "when you approach it my way"], they're like, "Okay, I get it." That's part of the respect. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

Kathleen's way is not to punish or to silence, but to establish a common purpose—in this case, she wants to hear Demetrius' idea, and Demetrius, ostensibly, wants to have his idea heard. If Demetrius speaks while another student is speaking, Kathleen reasons, she, and perhaps others in the class too, cannot hear him. Rather than just enforcing the rule—"Don't talk out of turn"—she tries to help Demetrius to regulate himself. It is impossible to say for sure, but punishing or silencing Demetrius might have created a bigger conflict or discouraged Demetrius from participating at all, whereas Kathleen's approach attempts to keep him involved. Demetrius continued to speak without being called on, but in my observation, did not do so in a way that overwhelmed the discussion or silenced other students. In fact, I would describe Demetrius' participation—effusive as it was—as a positive, generative force in the discussions I observed. At the end of the quote, Kathleen identifies her approach as another manifestation of her respect for students. Her approach, she implies, respects her students as autonomous individuals with needs and feelings—in other words, it respects their humanity, and they respect hers in return.

In Daniel's class, I noticed several examples of behavior that would potentially warrant disciplinary action in other teachers' classes, but that did not seem to bother Daniel very much at all. The class that I observed was first period and, as might be guessed, students would sometimes arrive late. Typically, they would arrive within the first five minutes, but on one occasion, a student entered more like fifteen minutes late and during the middle of a discussion. Daniel's only visible reaction was to smile at her as she found her seat. Ten minutes later, she made arguably the most important contribution of the entire discussion. I never asked Daniel about his or the school's respective tardiness policies, but his non-reaction in this instance was very much in line

with his approach towards student behavior in general. I highlight the fact that this student went on to make an important contribution because it demonstrates how the decision not to address a student's "negative" behavior (at least publically in the moment) can pay pedagogical dividends. Would this student have been so willing to jump into the discussion if Daniel had chastened her for being tardy? Possibly. But possibly not. I put "negative" in quotes because, as I demonstrate below, Daniel's instinct is, in fact, to challenge hasty judgments of student behavior.

The following excerpt from a stimulated recall helps to illustrate Daniel's compassionate approach to managing students' behavior. Daniel's comments are prompted by watching a video of a graded discussion in which a student, Bernice, is seen on camera playing solitaire on her laptop:

> There's one thing happening that a lot of people might think would annoy me and that I don't care about at all and that's that Bernice is playing solitaire. I am someone, when I'm at a faculty meeting, I have to do something, like, to shut down part of my brain, to, like, be able to sit places and listen. So, what Bernice is doing, I have no problem with, because you'll see, I mean, you might not see video-wise, but, you know, Bernice jumps in. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

Bernice does, in fact, jump in. As with the late student described above, Daniel's non-reaction pays off in that Bernice remains a contributing member to the discussion. If Daniel had chosen, instead, to reprimand or to correct her behavior, it's possible the outcome would've been different. In his remarks, Daniel walks us through his interpretation of Bernice's behavior. To do this, he projects his own behavior on to Bernice's, a tendency that might be limiting in the sense that not all student behavior is

going to be so immediately relatable, and, of course, his projections could be flat-out wrong. Nonetheless, Daniel's response is rooted in a baseline assumption that students' behavior comes from a place of need, rather than from a place of non-compliance or insubordination. In other words, the specific behavior, which very well may be insubordinate and perhaps even disrespectful to the teacher, can be traced to very human and, therefore, understandable emotions and needs of the student, and teachers, Daniel suggests, are well served by listening to those emotions and needs.

Additionally, as Daniel continued to speak on Bernice's solitaire-playing, he connected his response—or, more accurately, lack of response—to issues of power more broadly:

> **Daniel**: Bernice is listening and figuring out and is still engaged, so like, Bernice playing solitaire, I don't, I'm perfectly fine with. In fact, I'd rather her do that than, you know, um, uh—
>
> **AB:** Put her head down?
>
> **Daniel:** Not have the ability to. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

Daniel continues to justify his non-response with his assumption that Bernice is actually paying attention despite playing solitaire, an assumption that is validated when Bernice participates in the discussion. But one wonders if his response would be the same if she were, in fact, simply checked out. The last part of this exchange answers that question. For Daniel, his response is not just about giving students the benefit of the doubt. It is about resisting the urge to control students. Daniel would rather Bernice have the freedom to play solitaire than for that freedom to be taken away. Would Daniel have taken more direct action if Bernice played solitaire every day and never participated in

discussions? I suspect so. However, his style was not to publicly confront students about their behavior. On one occasion, I witnessed him respond to a student who spent the majority of a class period with his head down on his desk. Daniel never said anything to the student during class, but pulled him aside after the bell and, without scolding him, gently urged him to get more sleep.

All four teachers demonstrated a willingness, if not necessarily a purposeful intent, to break from the rigidity of basic classroom policies. For example, students sat where they wanted to sit in Daniel's and Kevin's classes. Kathleen's students earned the responsibility to choose their own seats for the last month of the school year. Kevin was adamant that if students had to use the bathroom, they should get up and do so without asking him for permission. I never witnessed Daniel deny a bathroom request or give a student pushback about a request. Sara allotted ten minutes halfway through each class for students to use the bathroom and check their phones. Daniel's students used their technology freely. Sara took a lenient stance with regards to tardiness, as the following exchange demonstrates:

Xenia: I don't like science.

Sara: This isn't science.

Xenia: Science made me late. I don't like being late.

Sara: I didn't mark you late. (Field Notes)

I include these details to make the case that these were not classroom spaces in which students' behavior was closely surveilled and/or regulated. Students were granted the freedom, in most cases, to talk to their neighbor, or get out of their desk to, say, throw something away or grab a tissue. That's not to say that the teachers did not create and

demand structure, it's just that, within and amidst those structures, they also ceded significant control to students.

Kevin spoke most directly to his rationale behind curtailing his authority over students' behavior:

> In general, I just don't like to run a classroom as if it's a space of confinement, like, once they enter into the classroom, they can't leave it cause they have to go to the washroom. I get offended by the idea that students have to ask me if they have to go to the washroom. I don't like telling students where to sit, although I'll make suggestions, and I'll want them to make better decisions if they're being distracted by people sitting around them. But, I don't know, I'd rather just try to have them learn how to leave the room at appropriate times for appropriate reasons and how to make decisions about where they want to sit as if they were in college, and when they can do that, I don't have to treat them as if they're five years old. (Kevin, Stimulated Recall)

A couple of ways that schools and teachers "confine" students is, as Kevin explains, by telling them they can't leave the room or by telling them where to sit. This is confining in a physical sense—i.e., it limits students' movement, including when and how they do basic, human things, like go to the bathroom or get a drink of water—but it also raises questions about the relationship between physical and mental forms of confinement, between the relative rigidity of basic classroom policies and the conditions necessary to support a strong dialogic classroom culture. It seems contradictory, on the one hand, to exert strict control over students' bodies and then, on the other, to expect them to freely traverse some intellectual territory, or, to put it differently, to relinquish intellectual

authority while maintaining rigid physical authority. The data does not permit me to draw any conclusions about the extent to which physical authority and intellectual authority are related, but it is striking that the four teachers in this study, all of whom are committed to discussion, without exception, eschew the kind of rigid control over students that is often associated with a well-managed classroom.

Of course, selectively relinquishing control is not entirely without undesired consequences, as Kevin acknowledges while describing his bathroom policy:

> The policy's just that you can leave to go to the washroom if you need to, but don't leave in the middle of someone talking. Don't go there just because you want to do something with your phone. Obviously, they don't all obey that. You know, some kids will do that on a regular basis, leave because they want to go text somebody. But the majority of kids won't. And I don't want to set up regulations that are going to make those other kids demean themselves by asking if they can go to the bathroom. (Kevin, Stimulated Recall)

In Kevin's mind, the possibility of a few students making bad choices is a small price to pay for a policy that affords dignity to students. It would be, in his words, "demeaning" to force students to ask permission to use the bathroom, even if a few students abuse the freedom to go without asking. This is a radical stance, at least within our contemporary educational context in which the practice of making students ask permission to go to the bathroom is normalized. Removed from that context, it's not so radical. When else do humans have to ask another human being if they can use the bathroom? Certainly there are other such contexts, but I would imagine that those contexts, on the whole, emphasize practices of confinement over practices of liberation. One of the liberating "novelties" of

going to college is that, in general, students don't have to ask permission to use the bathroom anymore, ostensibly because they're adults and, therefore, can be trusted not to abuse that freedom. Kevin seems to imply here that the assumption that high school students *would* abuse that freedom is disrespectful to the great many students who would not. He also expresses a real distaste for the idea that he should be some kind of gatekeeper standing in between another human being and the bathroom. In this way, Kevin's bathroom policy signals to students that his classroom is a place where they are liberated from some fairly ubiquitous power structures, and that he, as their teacher, eschews some of the more typical symbols of a teacher's power.

It must also be acknowledged that, in all likelihood, Kevin's lack of a seating chart contributed to the general noisiness of his room. Since Kevin's students could sit where they wanted, they tended to sit near their friends. One group of boys always sat on the outside of the half-circle, three or four squeezed onto the couch and a few others crowded around them in seats. They were particularly prone to getting off-task and it was not uncommon for their side conversations to temporarily derail a discussion. Kevin would have to stop the discussion and call the group back to attention, sometimes multiple times during a single discussion. I can't say for certain that a seating chart would have fixed the problem, but it seems reasonable to conjecture that Kevin's hands-off management style sometimes made discussions harder than they needed to be. That said, he might rationalize this as a necessary evil, as part and parcel of creating classroom policies that respect students' personal liberty.

When a classroom management intervention was necessary, the teachers did it with a light hand. For example, when Kathleen caught a student attending to personal

business on his phone, she responded, “Put your phone away,” then teased, “No one’s texting you,” and smiled. This was fairly representative of how the teachers responded to issues that would fall into the broad category of classroom management. Rather than scolding or getting upset, they were more likely to ask kindly but directly for the desired behavior, or, as in the example above, to disarm the student(s) with humor. Kathleen’s strategy of teasing worked because she had an established rapport with this student (and the class, more generally), and so the student understood her intent to be playful rather than mean-spirited. From a strategic perspective, the humor effectively took some of the edge off of the mandate without undermining it. Other times, Kathleen just asked for what she wanted, taking care to present an attitude of respect towards the student, as in, “Rodney, will you take your foot off the chair, please? Thank you.” Even the way she said “Thank you” here—with a lowered, almost comical tone—communicated warmth. Similarly, Kevin tended to mix his classroom management with a fair amount of humor. Instead of just telling a student to put his phone away, I witnessed him say, “I know that phone’s not really part of your life right now.” It’s an oblique sort of request, but one that manages to be firm while maintaining a certain lightness of spirit. When a student continued to talk during Independent Silent Reading, Kevin pulled the student into the hallway rather than confronting the student publicly. As these examples show, Kathleen and Kevin were not averse to managing their students, but they were careful to do so in a way that did not disrespect their students or lay bare the power disparity between teacher and student.

Finally, one area where the teachers were not hesitant to lean on their natural authority was when it came to academic negligence, specifically when students did not

complete some required assignment. I witnessed a student approach Kevin at his desk, seeking forgiveness for a missed assignment. The student claimed he had completed the assignment, but forgotten to bring it to school. "I have a lot going on in my head," the student said. "I forget things." "Write it on your hand," Kevin responded, unmoved by the student's excuse. The interaction continued for a few moments longer, the student clearly embarrassed, and Kevin not letting him off the hook. Kathleen, too, could be tough when her students were less than diligent. When a student asked if she had an extra copy of the book they were reading, Kathleen said no, told him he needed to be responsible for himself and bring his book to class, and suggested that he find the book on his phone. This was despite the fact that underneath her desk, out of view of the students, was a pile of extra books. In an interaction with an emotional student (detailed more thoroughly in Chapter 4), Daniel gives the student an extension, but is firm that she "get it done."

At the beginning of one class, Kathleen discovered that quite a few of the students had not completed a character chart that was assigned to them in the previous class. Here is the exchange that followed:

> So on Thursday, I gave you the instructions to do the five questions and we did one of the character chart examples together and then I instructed you to do three on your own. Now when you came back to school Friday, I was not here, you had a substitute, and your instructions were to finish your character chart, and that was due today if you didn't finish it in class on Friday. And by the looks of it, you didn't do what I asked you to do. [Pauses.] Don't look at me with sad puppy dog eyes. It doesn't work. It's May. It might work in September, but it is May. Your

> teachers are over it. So what I'm going to do today is review with you my expectations. I'm going to give you about ten minutes to continue to work on these things, and at that point, if you're done, you turn it in. If you're not, I don't grade anything until it's done. Don't dare to turn in to me something incomplete. I will give it right back to you. I want you to take the time to do this and to do it well, than to just turn in something you did however you wanted, and then I just give it right back to you. I won't waste your time if you don't waste my time.

One might perceive the Kathleen above as somewhat at odds with the Kathleen who makes respect and relationship-building the cornerstones of her pedagogy. She is not easy on her students here: "Don't dare to turn in to me something incomplete." Yet, the words on the page do not capture everything about the interaction. When she delivers the sentence, "Don't look at me with sad puppy dog eyes," she does so with a smile and with warmth in her voice. Tone matters a lot here and Kathleen's tone communicates a kind of loving frustration—that she's mad because she cares, in this case about her students' academic performance and growth. If she did not care so deeply about her students' academic efforts, then it would be fair to question the extent to which she really respects her students and what all of the relationship-building is for. In other words, I argue that Kathleen's choice to wield her authority so nakedly in this situation is, in fact, a manifestation of her respect for her students.

Discussion

One of the recurring themes that ties this chapter together is the precarious balance that the participating teachers strike between sharing authority and activating their authority to support the students' academic success. Earlier in this chapter, I refer to

this give-and-take as a kind of dance that sometimes the teacher leads and sometimes the students lead. I call this balance "precarious" because it seems to me that negotiating this balance may be at the center of leading good discussions. Too little authority and students are not empowered to fill the dialogic space with their own ideas; too much authority and they are not adequately supported in taking up opportunities for discussion. Moreover, my observations of the participating teachers suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for how to strike the right balance. Although all of the teachers endeavored to share intellectual and physical authority with their students, they did not do so equally or in the same ways. Nor was the balance of authority static from moment to moment, let alone from month to month. The teachers negotiated and renegotiated this balance in response to dynamic learning environments—each one quite different from the others and embedded in a unique school context. Sometimes the teachers could be intentional about where and how they shared authority, and sometimes they had to improvise.

An important question, then, is, how do we train new teachers to manage this balance skillfully, especially when it is so dependent on context? Certainly challenging some of their inherited ideas about authority is a start, whether those ideas err on the side of structure or freedom. New teachers, and probably especially young, new teachers, may feel some significant pressure from within and without to establish their authority—both intellectual and physical authority. In the hands of an inexperienced teacher, this emphasis on control is likely to come at the expense of students' autonomy (though students will probably find other ways to express their autonomy). Conversely, new teachers who enter with utopian ideas about setting students free to engage a text or problem but without giving enough thought to the kinds of structures that may need to be

in place to support that freedom are not going to be well-positioned to serve the students who need support (which, I suspect, is most students). And that kind of teacher—and here I speak from experience—is at risk of swinging back too hard in the opposite direction when their initial attempts at discussion crash and burn. Thus, teacher educators would do well, as a start, to prompt new teachers to think about the ways in which structure and freedom, perhaps counterintuitively, might support one another.

But that doesn't answer the question about context. If the "right" distribution of authority depends heavily on context—and, thus, fluctuates dramatically from school to school, class to class, student to student, moment to moment—how can we prepare new teachers to find the sweet spot where students are empowered *and* supported? I would like to suggest here that one way to frame these considerations is to ask, when is it a teacher's *professional responsibility* to activate their authority? I think of Kevin's words about how he believes it is his responsibility to step in when a student says something that is racist/sexist/homophobic/etc. Although this activation of his authority may in some way undermine other messages he is trying to send about intellectual authority—i.e., in this case, the teacher does get something like the final word—the moment demands for him to speak out in no uncertain terms. To leave that work for his students to do without his clear and unequivocal support would be, in his view, a shirking of his professional responsibility.

I also think about how Kevin did not want his students to ask permission to use the bathroom whereas Kathleen sometimes denied students permission. Although I did not confirm this in my interviews with Kevin and Kathleen, I suspect their policies were very much influenced by their school contexts (and their relative status within those

contexts). Given Kevin's laissez-faire attitude, it is hard to imagine that he was hearing back from administrators about the number of his students in the hallway during class time, or that his students faced consequences for being in the hallway. Additionally, Kevin was the (slightly) more veteran teacher of the two, and so perhaps he felt more emboldened to buck a school-wide policy (if there was one). Perhaps Kathleen, on the other hand, felt more pressure from her school's administrators to actively monitor teachers' bathroom policies. Or perhaps she denied permission to some students because she did not believe it was in the students' best interests academically. Whereas Kathleen might have seen it as her professional responsibility to insist that students ask permission to use the bathroom, Kevin did not.

This idea of professional responsibility as justification for activating authority applies to the work of leading discussions as well. All four of the participating teachers attempted, in different but significant ways, to share intellectual authority with their students. Yet this did not mean that they did not also provide substantial support for students' discussion participation—support that was both facilitative and interpretive in nature. Another way to put this is that the hand of the teacher was always visible. It would be professionally irresponsible to expect students to have a rich discussion without facilitating and/or guiding their participation in some way. Although the amount of teacher-directed discourse needed will vary, it is unlikely that any group of students (or any large group of people for that matter) can go completely without. There is a kind of myth of dialogism that insists students do all of the intellectual work and that any monologic forays on the part of the teacher are to be avoided, or at the very least, represent a downgrade from the ideal. Not only is this myth impractical, it denies students

access to the teacher's expertise, a denial that threatens to do the most harm for lower-performing students. In the four classrooms I observed, Daniel's graded discussions come the closest to this teacherless dialogic ideal, but it cannot be overlooked that those discussions are supported by dozens of other teacher-led discussions in which Daniel draws freely on his interpretive expertise to guide students in educationally productive directions.

Finally, it should be noted that the teachers in this study are veteran teachers with confident teaching personas and deep understandings of their craft, which is to say they have a basic level of control over their students. Their classrooms, if sometimes loud and/or messy, were never out of control or completely unruly. For novice or struggling teachers who struggle to attain this basic level of control, the suggestion to relax their control is likely to be received as either incredibly naïve or utopian or both. I say this as a former teacher who struggled mightily with classroom management in my beginning years, and who understands how very hard it is to find the right balance between structure and freedom. At the same time, I would also hypothesize that many of these new teachers who struggle with classroom management also struggle with treating some or all of their students with respect and dignity, at least in ways that are received as such by their students.

CHAPTER VI: THE TEACHERS' PRACTICES

In Chapters 4 and 5, I examined the teachers' respect for students and drilled down on a practical manifestation of that respect: the teachers' efforts to share authority with students. Taken together, these chapters focused on what might be described as the sociocultural foundation for a strong dialogic classroom. This foundation—when it is premised on treating students with respect and positioning students as capable, astute thinkers—should, in theory, support all of the dialogical work in the classroom. However, readers who came to this dissertation with a more urgent set questions—i.e., "Help! I'm leading a discussion tomorrow! What should I do?"—may be left unsatisfied thus far. That is by design. If I have taken anything from my close study of these four teachers, it is that the sociocultural foundation for a dialogic classroom is of paramount concern. To focus on the teaching practices of these four teachers absent attention to the respect they held for their students together with their deep commitment to sharing authority would be to strip the practices of what—from my analysis—made them successful.

In this chapter, I turn to the teachers' practices. Indeed, the teachers in this study prepared for, initiated, and facilitated text-based discussions on a regular basis, and deployed an array of observable and highly skilled teaching moves at each stage of a discussion's life span. Sometimes these moves seemed to be in conflict with the teachers' stated orientations (as rendered in the previous chapters); however, a closer look revealed a practice of discussion that was largely in consonance with the teachers' orientations. Specifically, I draw from the data to warrant the following sub-assertion: The teachers

enacted teaching moves *around* and *during* discussions that were intended to buttress students' abilities to participate effectively and increase the likelihood of a rich discussion. The practices formed a pedagogically coherent tapestry that supported students' capacities for text-based discussion. Additionally, the discussions involved considerable teacher-generated discourse as the teachers negotiated between their dialogic goals and specific learning goals.

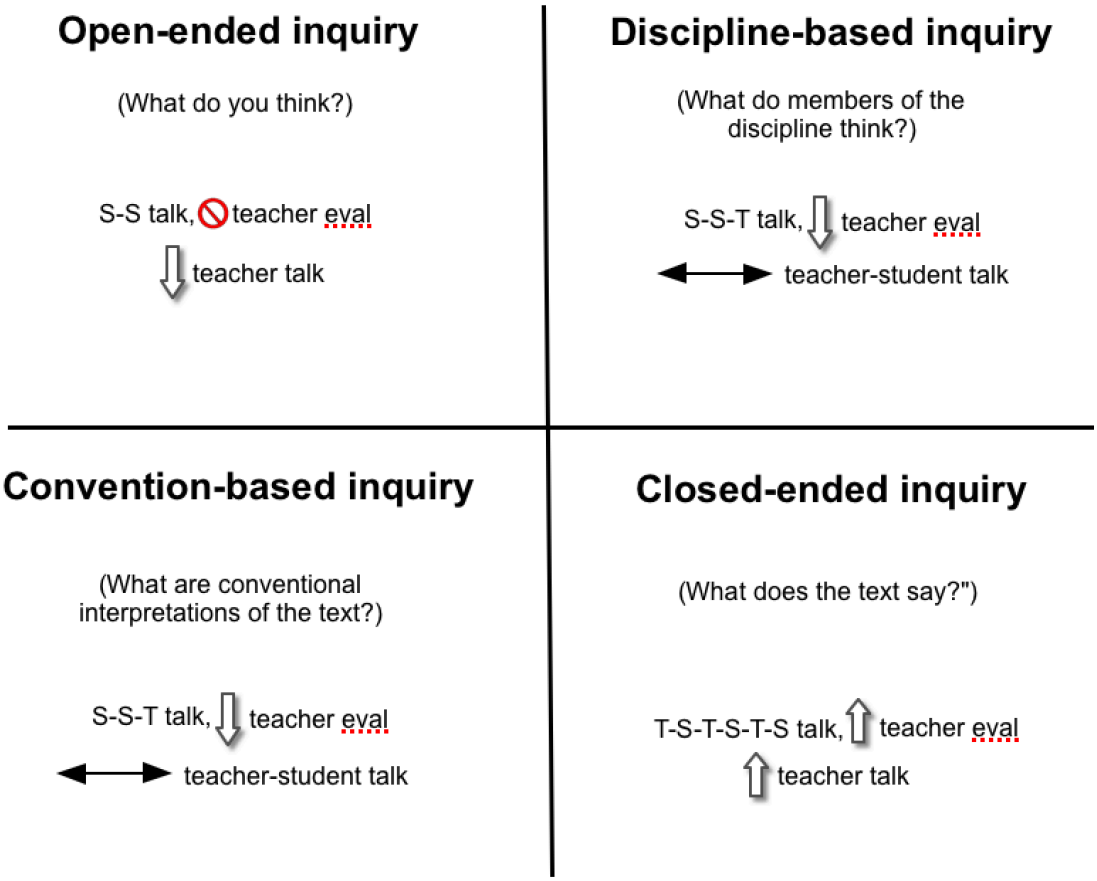
In reality, I have touched on the teachers' practices already. When, say, Kathleen compliments a student's haircut, or Kevin expresses admiration for a student's writing, those are practices. Similarly, when Daniel takes action to diminish the authority of his own voice, or when Sara relaxes her control over the writing workshops, those, too, are practices. The difference is that, in this chapter, the focus is on the practices themselves rather than how the practices exemplify the teachers' broader orientations towards students and learning. That said, since practice reveals orientation—or, perhaps, more accurately, since practices *have* orientations—there will still be discussion of the underlying orientations that animate the teachers' practices.

To ground this analysis of the teachers' practices, I employ the criteria for a good discussion that I outlined in Chapter 2. These criteria represent a distillation of sorts, culled from the literature on discussion and my own experience as a teacher and teacher educator. In short, I identify good discussions as discussions that are *student-generated*, *focused on learning goals*, *coherent*, and *respectful*. I do not mean to suggest that every "good" discussion will contain all of these qualities in equal measure or that they will hold constant over the course of a single discussion. Regardless, the criteria provide a useful frame within which to interpret a teacher's actions during a discussion.

Additionally, in the following pages, I consider how instructional purpose might affect a teacher's enactment of dialogism. To this end, I turn to the matrix of four possible instructional purposes for discussion, also introduced in Chapter 2 (Figure 6.1).[22] Together, I use these analytical frames to better understand the teachers' practices both with regards to a more universal conceptualization of what is a good discussion and on their own terms.

Figure 6.1

Instructional Purpose Matrix



Most examinations of discussion practice in the literature focus only on the discussion itself, occasionally extending that examination to include the teacher's set-up

[22] Recall also that a single discussion might attend to multiple instructional purposes—that is, I do not mean for a discussion to be contained by the quadrants of the matrix.

of the discussion. My analysis places the discussion back into its larger context. I begin by describing the ways in which the teachers built discussion into their curriculum so that it was not a stand-alone activity but an integral component of their pedagogy. Next, I examine the teachers' practices leading up to and during discussions. I give special attention to the question of how much teacher talk is too much teacher talk. Since this question cannot be answered absent of the discussion's larger instructional context, I consider in particular the influence of the teachers' learning goals on their choices around talking. I conclude by describing how the teachers' content knowledge and knowledge of students bore on their discussion practice.

"I would say [discussion's] the cornerstone": Pedagogical Coherence

By pedagogical coherence, I refer chiefly to the pervasiveness of discussion. It was not something the teachers treated as an isolated activity or as out of the ordinary. It permeated the participating teachers' pedagogies, laying the groundwork for and building on other class activities. It could not be removed from the classes that I observed without sending the whole house of cards crashing to the floor. It was too central, too interwoven with everything else.

Making Discussion Commonplace

I touched upon how the teachers strove to made discussion commonplace in Chapter 5, but treat it more fully here. Discussion did not require any special kind of introduction in the classrooms I observed (at least not once the school year was underway and discussion norms had been adequately established). To give an example of how the teachers sought to normalize discussion, here is Daniel's response to my question about whether he ever moves his desks into a different formation for discussions:

> If I'm trying to make discussion as integral to the curriculum as I want, I don't want to make a big production out of a discussion. I want them to know we can discuss things at any point of the lesson on any day, as opposed to, that we have to, like, get into a special, you know, discussion circle or anything like that. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

In fact, with the exception of Sara's writing workshops, none of the teachers altered their desk setup for the purpose of discussions.[23] Daniel argues that this choice serves a kind of symbolic purpose. Whereas getting into a discussion circle or some other more discussion-friendly formation confers a kind of specialness to discussion, staying in the same formation emphasizes the everyday-ness of discussion. This is not to say that there are not potential pedagogical advantages to be gained from making discussion "special," but Daniel's point is that for teachers who seek to make discussion integral to their curriculum, setting aside a special time or using a special desk setup for discussion sends a contradictory message.

Practically speaking, it's also just a lot easier to stay in the same formation. As any teacher will attest, getting a roomful of high school students to move their desks into a new formation can be an inefficient process, not to mention a noisy one. Foregoing the desk-moving, on the other hand, allows teachers to move relatively swiftly from not-discussion to discussion, to make the transition almost invisible. This was, in fact, the case for many of the discussions that I observed. There was no elaborate build-up to the discussion, no naming of the discussion a la, "Okay, now we're going to have a

[23] It should also be said that none of the teachers used rows, and that all of the desk formations permitted students to see the faces of, at least, some of their peers.

discussion." The only marker of a discussion's beginning might be the asking of a question that accommodated multiple interpretations.

This was especially true of Kevin and Kathleen who tended to intersperse discussion with comprehension work. Kevin used quizzes as a launch into discussion. As the class went over the answers to a comprehension quiz, he would riff off of the quiz's closed questions to ask related but open-ended questions. In one class, he pivoted from the quiz question, "Piggy feels betrayed by Ralph because Ralph does what?" to "Piggy felt betrayed by Ralph because Ralph told everyone to call him Piggy, right? Is this a big deal?" which led into a brief discussion about the larger social ramifications of name-calling. Similarly, Kathleen's movement from comprehension to discussion and back to comprehension happened in the blink of an eye. In one three-minute span, she moved from "What is Daddy Clidell and Maya's relationship like?" to "What is the role of a father in a child's life?" and back to "How does Daddy Clidell make his money?" Obviously, a discussion that short is not going to allow students to really delve into something as big as the role of a father, but it is long enough to get a few student ideas on the table. My larger point here is that Kevin and Kathleen, as these examples show, move into and out of discussions with very little fanfare. Rather than affixing discussion to their teaching like some sort of Frankensteinian limb, they have integrated it so deeply that the seams are hard to see.

I also want to conjecture here that the ease with which teachers are able to move into discussion may have implications for a teacher's likelihood to have discussions. If discussion is, as Daniel says, "a big production," teachers may be less likely to commit the time and energy necessary to have one, but if they can happen anywhere and at any

time (and might only last for a couple of minutes as opposed to blocking off a more substantial chunk of time), it seems reasonable to conjecture that teachers will have more of them.

Integrating Discussion Into the Curriculum

In addition to building a classroom culture where discussion can happen "at any point of the lesson on any day,"—in essence, making it ordinary—the participating teachers integrated discussion into the rest of their respective curricula as well. Discussion laid the groundwork for and built on other class activities. It was not an interruption from students' regularly scheduled programming, but a featured component of that programming, working in close relation with everything else to support students in meeting specific learning objectives. Here Sara speaks to the many objectives discussion might serve within a lesson or a unit:

> I use discussion to pause the lesson and to let students do some talking and listening about a key concept or something that's related that they bring from their experience. So I use it as a sort of a pacing feature in my lesson. I use it as a debrief. I use it as an anticipatory activity. I use discussion to think about what we did for homework or how you been working on this activity or how such-and-such thing is going. So I guess like a reflective and continued work piece. Yeah, thinking about something, sort of related to this idea that talking helps us think, so I think I use discussion for a lot of thinking work too. (Sara, Preliminary Interview)

Implied in Sara's cataloging of some of the possible objectives of a discussion is the notion that a discussion should have a pedagogical relationship with the rest of the lesson or unit of which it is a part.

To give an example of what this looked like in practice for Sara, she begins one grammar-focused lesson by asking students to get into pairs and discuss the following questions: "1) How do you ride a bike? 2) How do you speak English?" After about five minutes of pair work, she transitions into a whole group discussion on the same questions, the purpose of which is for students to come to the realization on their own that even though they are all English speakers, it is hard to explain to someone else *how* they speak English.[24] This leads into a lecture and PowerPoint presentation on grammar during which she complicates conventional notions about what is a grammatical error. Specifically, she argues that if the meaning of a sentence is clear, there is no real grammatical error.[25] Halfway through the lecture, she initiates some discussion on a few sample sentences that she projects on to the board. In the final activity, students do some writing on one of three questions (e.g., "Did anyone ever tell you that you speak or write badly or incorrectly? Did you ever hear a judgment like this applied to others?") and share those ideas with their table groups. "Tomorrow," she concludes, "we will talk more about 'correct' and 'incorrect' and language judgment. We're going to start by talking about accents."

In this one lesson, Sara uses discussion in at least four of the ways she describes above. First, she uses it as "an anticipatory activity," in the sense that the opening

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[24] In Sara's words: "Even if you could not explain what you are doing, you are expertly speaking English."

[25] I should add here that this lesson was part of a larger unit on grammar that was held together by two main goals: a) to improve students' facility with written English by providing them with "metalanguage" about how English works and b) to build the confidence of her students, the majority of whom were placed in the class because they were identified as struggling writers.

discussion anticipates the themes of her lecture. By breaking her lecture into two parts and giving students some time to think out loud, she uses discussion as a "pacing feature" and as an opportunity for students to "talk and listen about a key concept." And by concluding with a small group discussion, she uses it as a "reflective and continued work piece" (which also serves as an "anticipatory activity" for tomorrow's work). My larger point, however, is less concerned with Sara's rough typology of possible discussion objectives than it is with the way Sara integrates discussion into her lesson. The discussions in this lesson are not isolated activities, but parts of a whole, and, as such, integral to that whole. Key to Sara's ability to seamlessly weave discussion into her lesson is her precise understanding of the range of ways in which discussion might be used in combination with other modes of instruction to meet a clearly defined learning objective.

When I asked Daniel what role discussion played in his class, he replied: "I would say it's the cornerstone. I try to gear all of my lessons based on things students say in class." Daniel makes a case here for discussion as a crucial means of instructional assessment. By listening to students during discussions, Daniel is able to tailor his instruction to meet their specific needs, to be responsive to the specific students in front of him as opposed to some more or less generic conceptualization of 10th graders. Similarly, Sara identified hearing "what kinds of questions they're wondering about the text" as an important benefit of discussion. She tries, in subsequent lessons, to return to these questions. Kathleen noted that discussions give her "a deeper insight into her students." For these teachers, discussion and lesson-planning have a cyclical relationship. Discussions provide them with information that they use to plan subsequent discussions,

including what more teacher-centered work they might need to do to supplement those discussions.

On a more macro planning level, Daniel uses discussion to support students' writing. For example, the major assignment that students were working on while I was visiting Daniel's class was an essay on the *Great Gatsby* for which they had to invent a topic (i.e., Daniel didn't give them a specific prompt to write about). As he explains here, he intended for the discussions to be a kind of idea forge, a place for students to try out and/or hear ideas that they might eventually take up in essay form:

> So I feel like [the essay] is the end point. We have this huge, big discussion, a graded discussion where we talk about all of these aspects of the book, all of these interpretations of the book, all of these details of the book, and one of the things that that's doing is giving them this kind of smorgasbord of ideas that they can pick from for writing about something….And so part of the thinking about that and coming up with their own thesis is having a really rich idea of the book with a lot of different interpretations and then pulling out the one that you're interested in and then pursuing that. So I feel like what's largely happening is that the discussions are giving them this wide variety of ideas that they can investigate and then they pull out one that will become their essay. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

As the "cornerstone" of Daniel's class, discussions serve a foundational role. Another way to say this is that, as the cornerstone, discussions support a great many other stones. In this quote, Daniel explains how discussion supports and coheres with some of the other learning objectives of his class—in this case, objectives around writing and

argumentation. By exposing students to a variety of interpretations and giving students an opportunity to try out ideas, discussions serve as an essential pre-writing activity, making the very challenging task of coming up with a topic that will sustain an essay a little more within reach.

In addition to directly supporting students' writing, the discussions supported Daniel in targeting the individual writing support that he gave to students. Before students actually began writing their *Great Gatsby* essays, Daniel met individually with each student for four minutes while the rest of the class moved through learning stations. The objective behind these conferences was twofold: a) to hear students' ideas, and b) to help students clarify and/or focus their ideas. Four minutes is not a lot of time, and some students needed every second of it, if not more. In the following quote, Daniel explains how the discussions positioned him to use this time efficiently.

> I know things about [Student X] from the discussions that I'm able to bring up here. I know things about what he looks for in what he reads in the discussion. So there's a lot of prior knowledge that we have of each other that he's bringing into this brief conversation that come from those graded discussions, but that we're able to kind of really quickly deploy here. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

Since the discussions had already provided Daniel with a sense of each student's strengths, weaknesses, and general intellectual interests, these conversations could hit the ground running. Daniel could anticipate what kind of support a student was most likely to need. No less importantly, these individual conferences supported the work that happened in discussions. They provided students with a protected opportunity to talk through their

ideas and receive direct, personalized guidance from Daniel—in other words, to practice the skills required to participate productively in a discussion.

In sum, the teachers integrated discussion into their respective curricula, creating a pedagogically coherent experience for students. Discussions were not treated as some kind of special activity or done in isolation from the rest of the lesson or unit of which they were a part. On the contrary, they were enacted with the whole very much in mind, supporting the teachers' larger learning objectives, and providing teachers with essential information about the extent to which they were meeting those objectives.

"It's work, right? It's not choreography. It's not a performance.": What The Teachers Did During Discussions

Since evaluating a teaching move without considering the teacher's larger goals is kind of like evaluating a chess move without considering the chess player's larger strategy, I want to take a moment to articulate what the teachers' broad goals for discussion were. Some of this may seem redundant with my description of the teachers' efforts to shift authority to students—an intellectual repositioning that implies a great deal about the teachers' goals for discussion. However, I think it is important enough to situate the teachers' discussion practices within their explicitly stated goals for discussion that I will risk the redundancy.

The teachers' broad goals for discussion were more alike than they were different, united by a basic belief that discussions ought to provide an opportunity for students to interact with ideas out loud together. "There have to be questions," Sara explained. "The questions have to be answered. Maybe they get answered more than once or in different ways….I also really like it when students ask their own questions of the discussion."

Daniel referred to discussion as "the laboratory" and "a space where [students] can play and attempt to come up with meaning themselves." Kevin emphasized the collaborative nature of discussions: "I want to be in a class where the exchange of ideas is among everyone and you feel like you are part of the community of learners as opposed to each person kind of doing their own thing." Kathleen offered her belief that students learn more from one another than they learn from her as justification for her commitment to discussion. Additionally, she noted that she's not looking for discussions to arrive at some specific understanding of the text or a question: "Sometimes discussions are more just to be able to hear other perspectives of an issue, to share your thoughts or feelings."

The teachers had more to say about what they hoped for in discussions, but I think this sampling of their views should suffice to provide a context for the teachers' practices. In general, their descriptions of the goals of discussion echoed the predominant assumptions about discussion found in the literature, chief among them an emphasis on the openness of the discourse. This can be seen in Daniel's characterization of discussions as "a space where [students] can play" and Kathleen's assertion that the purpose of discussion is sometimes just "to share your thoughts or feelings." Interestingly, the teacher is notably absent from this representation of discussion, except in the sense that a teacher has to take a step back to open up space for the students. This emphasis on openness corresponds with a tendency in the literature to frame discussion as in opposition to the more typical I-R-E (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) pattern of discourse. I-R-E is teacher-directed (monologic) and discussion, in contrast, is student-generated (dialogic). Yet, despite this stated commitment to open-ended dialogic inquiry, the discussions I observed involved a great deal of teacher-directed and/or teacher-

generated inquiry, to the point of seriously limiting the students' freedom to discuss openly. Was this a contradiction between the teachers' orientations and their practice? Were these even discussions, I wondered? A closer look, however, suggested another possibility—that these were, in fact, discussions, and that the hard distinction between monologic and dialogic teaching practices, so useful as a kind of shorthand, may not fully reflect the complexities of dialogism in action. To provide a full picture of the teachers' discussion practices, I present an overview of the teachers' practices in aggregate—that is, what I saw the teachers do before and during discussions that seemed to be aligned with leading good discussions, as defined in Chapter 2. Then I turn to some more substantive analysis of the teachers' practices within the context of specific discussions, focusing on the relationship between the teachers' learning goals and their discussion practices—a relationship that I argue is the source of some of the seeming contradictions between the teachers' actions and their orientations.

The Practices: Scaffolding the discussion

The participating teachers did significant work to support students' development of the content knowledge and discussion skills necessary to participate in discussions. The data does not allow me to make any claims about *how much* content knowledge students need to participate in a text-based discussion. The answer to that question likely depends on the question(s) the teacher asks during the discussion and on the specific student (at least). Suffice it to say that if a teacher asks something like, "What is the author saying about the American Dream?" students will probably need, at a minimum, an understanding of what is meant by the "American Dream" in addition to a basic understanding of what happens in the story. To this end, all of the participating teachers

employed various means to ensure that their students had, at the very least, enough content knowledge to participate at the beginning of a discussion. I qualify that statement with "at the beginning" because it is possible that a discussion moves into a place that exceeds the content knowledge of some students, even if, theoretically, everyone had the requisite content knowledge to engage the initial query.

As I detailed earlier in this chapter, Kevin used comprehension quizzes as a launch into discussions. Reviewing a quiz might take two to three class periods, as Kevin would build on the quiz questions to ask related but open-ended questions intended to spark discussion. To give a couple of examples, he follows the quiz question "Piggy feels betrayed by Ralph because Ralph does what?" with the discussion question "Is this a big deal [that Ralph betrays Piggy]?" He follows "When Jack spots a small pig in the thicket that's stuck, what does he do?" with:

> So here's this little pig, stuck right in front of him. Jack's talked all this big mess about he's going to be the leader of the hunters, but he's got the pig right there, and the knife, and he's ready to stab it, but he's unable to do it. So why is he unable to do it?

By establishing what happened in the book before launching into the discussions, Kevin preserves the possibility that students who didn't do the assigned reading or who struggled with the reading have enough of an understanding of the book's key plot points to engage with the book's bigger questions and themes. Here Kevin outlines his broader strategy:

> I don't necessarily think, like, okay, I'll have them read something, you know, at home and then we'll come in and I'll have a couple of questions about the passage

> they were supposed to read, because I would say the percentage of students who actually do the reading at home is pretty low, right? So a lot of times, if I assigned a particular chapter in a book for them to read and then I want to spend time talking about it, part of my talking about it is going to be, okay, everyone open up your book to page 56, let's read this together, so I know that they've read it, and then we talk about it. (Kevin, Preliminary Interview)

Implied in Kevin's strategy is the recognition that it is not a wise pedagogical choice to have a discussion if only some students are able to participate in it. Thus, he needs to do some work to make sure all of his students have enough content knowledge to potentially benefit from the discussion and, in turn, make the discussion more productive.

Daniel anticipates what content support his students are going to need and sets out to fill the gaps:

> I know what [my students] are going to see [in the reading] and what they're not. Or what some are going to see and some not. And so I can kind of tailor my lectures and their learning for the day to what they're going to generate naturally, what I kind of know they're going to generate naturally. (Daniel, Preliminary Interview)

For Daniel to successfully achieve what he describes here, he requires deep knowledge of his students—specifically, of the meaning(s) they are most likely to make from a given text. This knowledge guides his decisions around what content support to provide. Also implied in Daniel's words is the relationship between more monologic learning activities—as he says, his lectures—and dialogic learning activities like discussions. By lecturing on or building other activities around ideas he thinks his students will miss, he

increases the likelihood that students will bring those ideas into the discussion. Daniel's students corroborated this account:

> **S1:** So, like, before class, I know [Daniel] would sometimes…review the reading a little bit and not cover the entire thing, just get us to discuss things we didn't understand, right? And then from there we can have a discussion about it, or cover big points in the reading.
>
> **S2:** Yeah, he would give small summaries of the text and have us elaborate on it even farther in the discussions.
>
> **S3:** Yeah, or even in our journals, kind of, like, write about what happened in the previous chapters or discuss with the people at our table if we're kind of stuck.
>
> **S2**: Oh yeah, or he'll give you a topic that doesn't seem related to the book, but later on we would talk about it and it does relate to the book. (Student Focus Group)

Daniel's students identify a few strategies that Daniel uses to scaffold their content knowledge, including pre-discussion journaling, small group work, and the introduction of supplemental content that might be incorporated later into discussions.

By orienting students to the terrain of the discussion before initiating the discussion, Kevin and Daniel increase the pool of potential contributors. Additionally, they decrease the pool of students who are excluded from the discussion due to a lack of content knowledge. This may sound like I am making the same point twice. In fact, I am trying to gesture towards both the academic and the classroom management benefits of the way Kevin and Daniel frontload their discussions with a focus on content knowledge. If one of the primary academic goals of discussion is to elicit multiple interpretations and

perspectives, it behooves teachers to engage as many students in the discussion as possible. And by engaging more students, they lower the number of students who may be tempted to check out completely and/or engage in off-task behavior that could detract from the quality of a discussion (if not derail it completely).

In addition to scaffolding students' content knowledge, the teachers also scaffolded students' discussion skills. By "discussion skills," I mean students' ability to participate in ways that extend the discussion. Sara used small group discussions as a way to scaffold whole-group discussions. Before leading a discussion on the short story "Letter to God," Sara initiated an activity called "The Last Word" during which students picked a line from the story "that [they] would like to hear other people discussing," shared it with their table group, listened to what their tablemates had to say about that line, and explained why they chose it. After ten minutes, she launched the whole-class discussion by asking, "Were there any passages that your group still feels confused by?" This led relatively seamlessly into a whole-class version of what the students had been doing in their table groups.

This kind of small group exercise accomplishes at least two things. First, it orients students towards one another. And, second, it greases the wheels, so to speak. Rather than take turns sharing ideas that they came up with independently—an exercise more akin to a brainstorm—the students respond to an excerpt of text chosen by one of their peers. And since all of the students are required to respond to the same excerpt, they may be more inclined to build on one another's responses, even if it is just to agree with something somebody else said. Meanwhile, the student who chose the line practices listening. When Sara shifts to the whole-class discussion, all of the students have

practiced articulating a text-based idea in a smaller, safer setting, and, therefore, may feel emboldened to share that idea with the whole group. Sara's students confirmed the utility of this strategy:

> **S1:** …That helps us get our thoughts together before [Sara] asks the whole class, that way it's not like she's asking us right on spot, so we have time to, like, combine everyone's ideas.
>
> **S2:** It's like if you say what you're thinking and then everyone in your class, or everyone at your table is like, "I don't know," then you might rethink it before saying it to the whole class, so…[laughing].
>
> **S3:** It makes everything run smoother.
>
> **S2:** Yeah, it gives you--you're more comfortable to say anything because you've already talked to the people you're closer to.
>
> **S3:** And they agreed with you and they're like, "Yeah, yeah, that's good."
>
> **S2:** They're usually pretty straight up with you. (Student Focus Group)

Sara's students make the case here that the small group discussions help them to make their ideas stronger by "combining everyone's ideas" and to ease them into speaking in front of the whole class.

Daniel benefitted from school-wide practices that scaffolded students' discussion skills. As the department head of a relatively small department, Daniel had successfully made graded discussions a feature of all of the school's literature classes. So when Daniel's students entered his class on the first day of 10th grade, they already had a year of graded discussions under their belts. Additionally, Daniel, along with the other literature teachers, created a system called QARE (Question, Answer, Rebuttal,

Extension) that students follow during graded discussions, especially in 9th grade. When students want to speak in a graded discussion, they have to indicate with their fingers what kind of comment they want to make (one finger meaning question, two fingers meaning answer, and so on). This forces students, first of all, to be aware of the way their comment connects or doesn't connect to what has been said already. It also familiarizes students with the kinds of comments that help to extend a discussion. Unfortunately, I did not get to see this system in action; it wasn't until November that I observed my first graded discussion and, by then, Daniel had already stopped requiring it. However, several of his students voiced their appreciation for the QARE system (along with some of its constraints), including one student who pointed out, "It really focuses you to listen to other people, which is a hard skill for some, including myself."[26]

Another way Daniel scaffolded his students' discussion skills was by making the graded discussion a goal in itself. It is no small task for a group of 10th graders to sustain an approximately hour-long "teacher-less" discussion about a text, and it is unlikely that Daniel's students would have been so successful in doing so (as measured by the criteria for a good discussion) if not for the almost daily teacher-led discussions that buoyed students' comfort and proficiency with discussion. Daniel described these shorter, non-graded discussions as the foundation for the more demanding graded discussions:

> [The daily, non-graded] discussion is really how I create the environment and culture in my classroom that lets me do the much longer discussion. These

[26] Of the four teachers, Daniel benefitted the most from school-wide structures that supported discussion, although Sara and Kathleen also reported that their students had opportunities in other classes to participate in discussions. Kevin, on the other hand, reported that there was very little school-wide support for discussion at his school. Although the data does not allow me to draw any conclusions about the extent to which the teachers' practices were supported by a school-wide dialogic infrastructure (or stymied by a lack thereof), it does seem reasonable to conjecture that such an infrastructure would hasten the development of novice teachers' dialogic practice, and enable experienced teachers to go further faster. Daniel, for example, did not have to teach QARE. His students already understood the basics of how to participate in a discussion.

> discussions take maybe 10 minutes. They're not long, they're super low risk, there's no grade involved in it at all….No one has to come forward, although so many of them do, because that's kind of the culture of the class, is that we talk about things. This discussion after the journal really allows them to feel free to just talk about whatever they want. You know sometimes they bring up things that aren't even related to the question I asked because they know it's just kind of a safe time to get something off their chest or talk about something. But also it's very important in terms of what I want to teach in terms of persuasion and rhetoric and disagreeing with people and standing up for yourself, all of these things….And I think it really impacts the graded discussions because they learn that we can disagree and we can even argue without, you know, it being personal. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

By giving students daily, low-stakes practice with discussion, Daniel reinforces some of the cultural/discursive norms and rhetorical skills that he hopes will, ultimately, support students' success in the graded discussions. To provide additional opportunities for students to practice their discussion skills, Daniel also led small-group discussions and hosted individual writing conferences, one result being that it was virtually impossible for a student—no matter how reticent—to make it to the graded discussion without having had to talk out loud about the text at some point. Taken together, these low-stakes, dialogic opportunities composed a suite of scaffolded discussion settings that nurtured students' discussion skills, which students would then be held accountable for in the graded discussions.

A note about grading: Daniel was the only teacher to give students a grade for their performance in individual discussions. Kevin gave students "progress" grades of which "participation" was a component, but this was more of a cumulative (and probably less quantitatively precise) measure. Sara, on the other hand, voiced her opposition to grading discussions:

> I don't grade talk. I would say that this stems from my beliefs and my practice about oral language and written language, that you use speech as a vehicle for writing, so to grade this to me feels like grading all of your rough drafts. So I grade polished public speaking that you've rehearsed for. (Sara, Preliminary Interview)

To receive full credit in one of Daniel's graded discussion, students had to contribute three new ideas—"new" meaning new to the discussion. In the three graded discussions that I observed, including the graded discussion that doubled as students' final exam, every student received full credit. It might be asked, why give grades if every student gets the same grade? Remember, these were hour-long discussions during which Daniel did not speak. That is a lot of time to fill with student talk. The grade, then, is intended to incentivize more talk and a greater diversity of voices. A potential downside is that it also incentivizes a less authentic kind of discussion as students are not necessarily speaking because they have something to say but because they are trying to meet a requirement. With regards to scaffolding, the fact that the teacher-led discussions are not graded but the student-led discussions are implies a kind of trajectory, the end goal of which is for students to be able to have a discussion without Daniel.

The Practices: Planning the discussion

By and large, the teachers did not write down detailed plans for the discussions they led. At most, they would plan a pre-discussion activity to generate ideas for the discussion, an opening question (often the same question that guided the the pre-discussion activity), and another question or two that build off of the opening question. Additionally, the teachers might plan to draw students' attention to a specific line or passage of the text (as opposed to talking about the entire text). Sometimes, as Kevin describes here, the whole plan would just be the opening question:

> A lot of times it is just that I'll have a question that I want to talk about, but sometimes there is more of a plan. In my head I'm thinking, "Okay, I'm going to talk about this, then I'll talk about that. And then I'm going to talk about that, and I'll talk about that." But a lot of times it is just a question. (Kevin, Preliminary Interview)

Kevin's insistence on the "I" pronoun is interesting here. Presumably a leader of discussions, as typically defined, would want students to do the talking. However, it may be that in the context of planning, Kevin is acknowledging that it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that a lesson or discussion meets certain learning goals. Regardless, what Kevin describes here is not a detailed lesson plan written out in bullet point form. Perhaps some of this unscriptedness can be attributed to experience. These teachers were all veterans of over ten years and were teaching books they had taught before. In fact, Daniel acknowledged that as he's gotten older, his plans have become "sketchier and sketchier." At the same time, it seems possible that the sketchiness of the teachers' plans facilitate the teachers' goals for discussion. By not planning out every detail, the teachers leave space for the students to fill in the discussion with their ideas.

And since the teachers are not tethered to their plans, their attention is, theoretically, less split between some predetermined plan for the discussion and what the students are actually saying.

All of that said, it is also a little misleading to say that the teachers did not plan their discussions. Despite what Kevin says above, it should be noted that his quizzes served as a kind of discussion plan. When he wrote his *Lord of the Flies* quiz, he was, in fact, planning the discussion, or, perhaps more accurately, a series of discussions that provided different entry points into the unit's guiding question: *What is William Golding saying about human nature?* A similar point can be made about the daily handouts that Kathleen used to guide her class's progression through the reading. These handouts—a mixture of pre-reading activities, text-to-self reflections, comprehension questions, and more open-ended questions—served as a map of the ideas she wanted students to explore further, in writing and in the discussions. Daniel planned his discussion prompts with an eye towards a larger learning trajectory:

> I like for my prompts from class period to class period to kind of go in some kind of order, whether that's chronological, or whether that order is kind of thematic. It might change, but I like there to be connections between prompts. (Daniel, Stimulated Recall)

Daniel did not want his discussions to be stand-alone, but to cohere together in educationally productive ways. In sum, although it's true that the teachers' discussion plans remained relatively loose, the discussions were, in fact, the fruit of a great deal of planning.

The Practices: Initiating the discussion

As noted in Chapter 2, a lot has been written about “authentic”/“open” questions versus “known information”/“closed” questions, the gist of which is that questions that support multiple answers tend to be better at generating discussion than questions with one right answer. Kathleen’s students confirmed this basic principle when I asked what kinds of questions work best when trying to have a discussion:

> **S1:** Asking maybe, like, why they think the character did something, or, like, why they chose that action or why they said what they said, or something like that. Just, like, it can't be yes or no in specific for that answer. You have to be able to talk about it.
>
> **S2:** You gotta be able to prove why they did it, what they were thinking.
>
> **S3:** It's basically, you gotta have more than one statement. You can't have just a bunch of just yes/no.
>
> **S2:** Yeah, you can't have, like, yes, and not have a bunch of reasons. You gotta, like, be able to argue. (Student Focus Group)

Kathleen’s students provide a useful metric for determining the discuss-ability of a discussion starter: does it generate ideas one has to defend? Additionally, they identify character motivation as particularly fertile ground for discussion.

The participating teachers echoed the students (and the literature) in their descriptions of what makes an effective discussion starter. Interestingly, Kevin’s point of entry to asking generative questions was his experience working in sports radio:

> The way I tried to run my show, either as a producer or as a host, was proposing questions, not questions that are closed-ended like "Who won the MVP in

> 1995?" but, like, "Is it fair to keep [Player X] out of the Hall of Fame?" (Kevin, Preliminary Interview)

In essence, what Kevin is saying here is that a good discussion starter should sustain argument. The first hypothetical question obviously doesn't. The second might. Of course, if everyone thinks it is fair to keep Player X out of the Hall of Fame, then it's not a great discussion question either. There has to be potential for dispute. The questions that Kevin used to initiate discussions about *Lord of the Flies*, almost without exception, required students to take a stance on an issue with at least two sides and defend it: e.g., "Is it a big deal that Ralph betrays Piggy by telling the other boys his nickname?" "Would you want to live in a society without grown-ups?" "Why is Jack unable to kill the pig?" All of these questions contain the potential for dispute.

> Daniel, too, perceived argument to be an important part of discussion:
>
> Discussion of just, "I noticed this, I noticed this, I noticed this," is meaningless. What you have to have is conflict in order for a discussion to really generate value. Now, of course, you know, we don't believe in fighting or anything like that, but a discussion has to be a confrontation of ideas that are put up against each other, and then, you know, either one walks away victorious or the other does or neither can win. But there's got to be conflict for it to be educationally valid. (Daniel, Preliminary Interview)

I can imagine that some readers might take issue with a few of Daniel's points here, in particular the notion that a student might "win" a discussion. And, in fact, that is a slight mischaracterization of what he actually says. The "one" walking away victorious, if we follow the grammar of the sentence, refers to ideas, not to students. An idea might "win"

a discussion if it is argued more clearly and compellingly than the other idea(s). Additionally, Daniel suggests a slight but important variation to the notion that a good discussion starter should support multiple interpretations. This is often taken to mean—maybe especially in English class—that every interpretation is right and no interpretation is wrong. Daniel's characterization of discussion as a "confrontation of ideas," on the other hand, pits ideas against one another. Yes, a good discussion starter should support multiple interpretations, with the addendum that it should not be possible for all of those interpretations to be equally right at the same time. Daniel initiated discussions with questions like, "What does Fitzgerald want us to know about love?" or "Was Myrtle's death an accident or intentional?" or "Was the movie version of *The Great Gatsby* a good adaptation?" It is hard to offer a response to any of those questions without making a case, explicitly or implicitly, for why other responses are less right.

Sara framed discussion a little differently. To her, the primary dynamic of discussion is not one of conflict but of collaboration.[27] Together, through discussion, students make some headway on a text: "I want them to get this experience that is, I guess, this empowering kind of practice, like, this is what a literature discussion should feel like." Her discussion starters are designed less to accommodate debate than to involve students in some collaborative interpretive work. To this end, Sara often elicited the opening question for whole-class discussions from the students themselves. For example, before a discussion about Jamaica Kincaid's short story, "Girl," Sara instructed students to generate as many questions as possible about the story ("Don't stop to answer

[27] I actually don't think that Daniel would disagree with Sara. I say this based on the fact that he doesn't attribute ownership to students' comments that he writes down on the board during graded discussions, a choice that he explained as follows: "The comment belongs to the group because if we're discussing properly, they're talking to each other and one comment is not just that person's comment. It's a response to someone else's comment, which is a response to someone else's comment."

them. Just write them all down."), share them with their table groups, and, as a group, select one question to ask to the whole class.

Kathleen emphasized the accessibility of a discussion starter. She argued that learning how to effectively initiate a discussion is a matter of "learning your kids, learning what works and what gets them motivated to want to speak up and discuss something, the way you pose a question maybe to make it a little bit more interesting or apply to them." When I pressed her on what she meant by "the way you pose a question," she elaborated:

> The vocabulary you use to make it understandable to our students. You know, maybe if it's something I want to get them to discuss, and it's large vocabulary words that they haven't understood, you know, I'll speak it that way, but then I'll rephrase it into a way that makes them think about it. And then…I'll put in little tiny thoughts as they talk, if I'm having them talk amongst themselves. So for example, yesterday, when I was asking them, "Do you think your death is predetermined?" maybe someone didn't understand "predetermined." "Well, do you think that it is already set for you when you're going to die or do you think that all of your choices and things will lead you to your death?" and then, as they're talking about it, I might say, "Okay, think about is this is a religious thing? A belief?" I might just throw in other things to get them to continue their conversation. (Kathleen, Preliminary Interview)

What gets one group of students "motivated to want to speak" may not work with another group of students. Thus, the relationship-building that is so important to Kathleen pays pedagogical dividends in the sense that it positions her to ask questions that she knows

will be interesting to her students, questions like, "Do you think your death is predetermined?" or "What is the role of a father?" or "Did Mr. Freeman deserve to die?" Additionally, this knowledge of her students provides her with a sense of when a question needs to be broken down in some way so as to make it more accessible. On a related note, she almost always wrote the opening question to a discussion down so that students could see it somewhere, a strategy used by three of the four participating teachers.

The Practices: Facilitating the discussion

In the following pages, I turn my attention to what the teachers did *during* discussions. Most of these practices were contingent in the sense that they were in response to students, but some operated as policies preemptively instituted to guide students' behavior (although the teachers' choices around when and when not to enforce the policy were contingent). By and large, the moves I observed the teachers making—and that they described to me in our conversations—corroborated the literature's recommendations for how to lead good discussions. I hope to add to that body of knowledge by placing these moves in the context of the sociocultural foundation described in the previous two chapters and by providing a more comprehensive account of the work of the leading discussions—meaning that I do not limit my focus to a single move or small set of moves. I parse the teachers' facilitation practices into two broad categories: 1) practices that draw out students, and b) practices that orient students to one another.

<u>Facilitation practices that draw out students</u>

I begin with practices that draw out students. By "draw out," I mean practices that help students to formulate and articulate their ideas. With respect to the four criteria of

good discussions that I lay out in Chapter 2, these practices are directed towards leading discussions that are "student-generated." I include how the teachers managed participation in this category because management decisions have ramifications for who gets to speak and for how long. All of the whole-class discussions I observed—with the exception of Daniel's graded discussions—followed a traditional format in which the teacher stood in the front of the room and managed students' participation, including calling on the next speaker. For the most part, the teachers encouraged students to raise their hands when they wanted to speak, but did not enforce a strict hand-raising policy. This was in keeping with the teachers' general aversion towards policing students' behavior. If a student responded to a question without being called on, the teachers typically did not interrupt the discussion to remind students of the rule. Nor did the teachers tend to cut students off. This isn't to say they didn't recognize when a student was taking up too much space. When this happened, the teachers took action to protect the dialogic space for other students, but endeavored to do so in a way that did not silence the speaker.[28]

Relatedly, the teachers tended to avoid cold calling students, a practice that might be used to bring students into the discussion who haven't spoken yet, or as a disciplinary measure when somebody appears to be off-task. When I asked Daniel why he doesn't cold call, he offered this explanation:

> It's part about making everyone comfortable. I think if people think discussions are an inquisition and that they could be called out at any moment to produce, then that adds a degree of fear that completely undermines everything we're trying

[28] See Chapter 5 (pp. 171-171) for an example of this from one of Daniel's discussions.

> to do. The discussion should not be something they're afraid of. The discussion has to be something that they participate in willingly because they are engaged with it and interested in it. So, by cold calling, if I turn it into an interrogation, then that kind of undermines everything I'm going for. (Daniel, Stimulate Recall)

At the same time, he noted that sometimes he will, technically, cold call a student if he sees, say, a look on the student's face that indicates they have something to say. This suggests a kind of awareness of the room that teachers must have when they are leading discussions, meaning their attention cannot be focused solely on the student who is speaking. Sara, diverging from Daniel somewhat, offered that cold calling might be used selectively to "invite" students to participate:

> Inviting people to participate is about getting those students who don't want to fight to get in and maybe gently sort of waking up or calling back students who are disengaged. But I don't believe in cold calling to embarrass people, so not, "What do you think, sleeping in the corner?" I never do that. (Sara, Preliminary Interview)

Like Daniel, Sara believes that some students need to be nudged to speak. As a self-identified "quiet student," Sara makes the case here that quiet students need an invitation sometimes; otherwise, they are apt to just let the more voluble students talk. And although she eschews the use of cold calling as punishment, she is not averse to using it as a way to call off-task students back to the discussion.

The teachers also practiced wait time. For example, after initiating a discussion, Daniel would wait until multiple hands were raised before he called on someone. He was less likely, however, to do this once the discussion was off and running, perhaps because

he did not wish to slow the discussion's momentum. There was also the kind of wait time that happened when nobody raised their hand. Sara, in particular, was quite remarkable in her commitment to this kind of wait time, especially during the writer's workshops, which were ostensibly student-led but that she participated in. In one workshop, I counted a silence that lasted almost a minute. Later, she elaborated on her philosophy towards silence:

> I want the students to have time to formulate their thoughts, and not feel like they have to be quick all the time. And sometimes the student who you're most surprised to hear from speaks up after a pause like that, especially if they know, like, it really is open space, you really can jump in. (Sara, Stimulated Recall)

Indeed, after the almost minute-long pause, Tameeka, a student who spoke very infrequently, broke the silence. If Sara had rushed in to fill that silence (or even come in after thirty seconds), she would have missed out on Tameeka's comment. Tameeka confirmed to me during the student focus group that silences help draw her out: "I'll speak if no one's speaking, but if, like, Thomas and Xenia had something to say….I would just let them speak instead of me." As anyone who has participated in a discussion can attest, silences can be painful. It is probably natural for a teacher to think, "Uh-oh, something's not working. I need to intervene." And that instinct might be right sometimes. It's possible that the question the teacher asked was confusingly worded or the students don't have enough content knowledge to answer the question or the students have said everything they have to say. In those cases, it's probably right to intervene.[29] But this episode from Sara's class confirms that sometimes it is better to make peace with

[29] Which might be done more or less skillfully.

the uncomfortable silence, and that this practice can make room for more reticent students like Tameeka.

Once students offered an initial response to a question or to something another student said, the participating teachers sometimes drew them out further by asking them to clarify or elaborate on their ideas. These prompts—which were not always in the form of questions—were, in essence, designed to get students to show their work: i.e., "Okay, so you think X. What in the text makes you think that?" In the following excerpt, Daniel employs a range of techniques (in italics) to surface his students' thinking:

> **Daniel:** Okay, tell me, what does Fitzgerald want us to know about love, or think about love, or ponder about love? What is he trying to say?
>
> [10 seconds of wait time.]
>
> **Daniel:** Go ahead, Noveen.
>
> **Noveen:** It makes people do stupid things.
>
> **Daniel:** It makes people do st--. *Give me an example.*
>
> **Noveen:** Like, when Myrtle, or Daisy, she ran over the person with the car, and Gatsby was like, "No, I'm just going to take the blame for it 'cause I love her." I mean, he ended up getting killed for it. And plus, I don't think she really loved him. Because if she did love him, she wouldn't have left him for Tom. But she said she left him for Tom because, what was it, because he didn't have money at the time, but if she really did love him, she wouldn't have left him.
>
> **Daniel:** *Why don't you think Daisy loves him?*
>
> **Noveen:** Okay, 'cause, I think she's a gold digger as well. Because at first she went for Gatsby just out of lust, but then she didn't want to marry him or wait for

him because he didn't have money, so she went for Tom, but if she really did love him, she wouldn't have gone to Tom. She would've waited even longer.

Daniel: Good. Other thoughts, other ideas about love. Who else is in love in this story, or supposedly? Bernice?

Bernice: Jordan and Nick.

Daniel: Jordan and Nick. *Alright, tell me about their relationship*.

Bernice: I think they just basically got caught up in the moment, like, I think there wasn't any other options [*Daniel gives Bernice an intrigued nod.*] for them to be with other people because that's like—wait, have we read the end yet?

Daniel: Uh-huh.

Bernice: Okay, so like at the end, she was just like, "I was engaged anyway." So that made me think like, well, the person she was engaged to wasn't there at the moment so she needed, like, a replacement.

Daniel: *So you think that they literally felt nothing for each other, that they were just dating 'cause they were around each other and had the same kind of friends and that was it?*

Bernice: Yeah, kinda, otherwise they wouldn't have left as easy as they did.

Daniel: Okay, good. What else? What else? There are lots of others. What are other relationships?

First, Daniel directs Noveen to the text by asking for an example from the text that supports the idea that love makes people do stupid things. Next, he follows-up by asking Noveen to further explain his thinking behind a specific idea—"Why don't you think Daisy loves him?" There is certainly more to discuss here with respect to the relationship

between Daisy and Gatsby, but since the purpose of this part of the discussion is to get as many ideas as possible on the table about what Fitzgerald might be saying about "love," he moves on to Bernice. In addition to directing Bernice to the text—"Alright, tell me about their relationship"—he uses two other techniques to draw her out further. First, he gives her a very noticeable nod midway through her comment, a nod that says, "Hmm, interesting. Keep going." Then he rephrases her idea, but with a tone that emphasizes the more disputable aspects of her point—"They literally felt nothing for each other…and that was it?"—prompting her to offer a few more words in defense. In this brief excerpt, Daniel oscillates between explicitly asking students to elaborate on their thinking and more implicit methods like using his body language and his tone to get students to say more.

Withholding praise was also a technique the teachers used to draw out students. This was not practiced all the time or equally across the four teachers. Kathleen, as described in Chapter 5, was a proponent of praise. Daniel noted that he makes a special effort to encourage those students who struggle to speak during discussions. However, he also made a case for selectively not praising students' comments. "If I were to be like, 'Yes! Great!'" he explained, "Then it distracts them from talking to each other." Moreover, a teacher's praise might signal to students that there is nothing more to say about that particular idea. Kevin's modus operandi as a facilitator was to be a skeptic. Whatever a student said, he would react in such a way as to suggest that he didn't quite buy it. Sometimes he would even present a "devil's advocate" counterargument. Take this excerpt from a discussion about the role of adults in a society:

S1: Adults, like, they've already lived a lot longer than us and they've already, like, I don't know. We're so young and naïve and adults could lead us through and help us grow to get to the point where they are. Does that make sense?

Kevin: [striking a tone of disbelief] The experience and wisdom of adults will guide y'all through? Janeen. One conversation, please.

Janeen: I mean, I always like getting advice from someone that has experienced more.

Kevin: That helps you?

Janeen: Yeah.

Kevin: Okay. Tyson.

Tyson: It's not really a matter of them being an adult. 'Cause that doesn't really mean much. It's the wisdom and it is the experience that helps guide you, but if you're not really mature enough or strong enough to stand on your own and you don't make the best decisions--

Kevin: But there are plenty of nations in this world run by adults that are a total disaster right now.

Tyson: Yeah.

Kevin: The civil war in Syria, millions of refugees, right? People leaving their homes with violence all over the place, for instance.

Tyson: But everything is run by adults.

Kevin: So that's my point. Are adults really going to solve the problem?

[Multiple students respond.]

Kevin: What does our wisdom gain us? For example, this morning, we have adults in this building who have been here for three decades. We have a lot of experience. Were we able to successfully navigate something as simple this morning as releasing one group of people from the assembly and sending the other people down?

[Multiple students say "no."]

S2: Okay, but that's, like, small. That's a small problem.

Kevin: So what does our wisdom and experience buy for us? Lea?

Lea: I feel like we don't really know as much about the world. Like, there's certain things that I just don't understand yet because I haven't had to deal with them yet. And so I feel like having adults, like, they kind of know about the things that we're going to have to deal with.

Kevin: Okay. And adults' knowledge is going to somehow make it better?

Lea: It's, like, how a kid with a good parent oftentimes seems to do better than a kid without a, like, good strong adult figure, I should say not necessarily a parent.

Kevin: Okay, that's legit. Steven.

Steven: If you're talking about living in, like, a paradise that provides food and she--not shelter, but, like, provides everything for them like they have in *Lord of the Flies*.

Kevin: Yeah.

Steven: Then it'd be a lot easier than in like a real world situation where you actually have to find food and you have to provide for yourself without an entire labor force.

Kevin: Okay, so if the food is available, you don't really need adults?

Steven: It's easier.

Kevin does a kind of performed skepticism throughout this discussion excerpt. The closest he gets to expressing that he's heard an idea he likes is, "Okay, that's legit." The rest of time, he communicates a general attitude of being unconvinced. His tone and his body language together say, "You think that, huh? Are you sure?" This communicates to students that the discussion is still very much open, that no one has said anything approaching the final word yet. Later, he takes this skepticism a step further and directly challenges the assumption (generated by students) that adults' so-called wisdom makes them indispensable. By presenting a counterargument, Kevin stokes the fire, pushing the purveyors of the original argument to refine their ideas and compelling others to weigh in.

Sometimes the teachers intervened in a discussion to make sure it didn't move on too quickly to another question or idea. This could take the form of a quick check-in, like this example from one of Sara's discussions:

S1: Can I, like, bring in another part from, like--

Sara: About this topic?

S1: About this topic, yeah.

Sara: Yeah.

On another occasion in the same discussion, Sara stops a student before he can move on to a new question: "Let's spend a little more time on this [question] and then I'll take yours." Interestingly, this was *not* an easy discussion. The group spent considerable time wrestling with a student-generated question—"How did Lencho go to the post office on

Sunday when the post office is closed on Sundays?"—that, at best, did not present a clear path to the text's big themes or ideas, and, at worst, focused on a relatively minor plot point. Instead of abandoning the question, Sara—and the group—persisted, ultimately connecting it to some meaningful ideas about Lencho's religiosity. It took some fairly labored discussion to get there, however—an observation that Sara herself makes after watching the discussion during the stimulated recall:

> I wouldn't say [the discussion] was a smashing success, but I think that without me, I'm guessing they might not have been able to press on a point as long. They might have switched topic or after a little bit of silence, like, "Well, I have another idea. Does anyone have another question?" So I think part of what I'm also trying to do is dig in on a topic before you just move on. (Sara, Stimulated Recall)

Although the ultimate goal is for students to generate the content of the discussion, Sara recognizes that their instincts might not always be the best instincts, and it is her job to direct them—in this case, by encouraging them to persist through a difficult discussion. This kind of discussion is rarely fun to be a part of, as a teacher or a student. In fact, it can feel downright unsatisfying. As Sara noted to me: "It's work, right? It's not choreography. It's not a performance."

A technique related to wait time, but slightly different in purpose, was simply remaining silent, or resisting the urge to come in after every student comment and respond to the comment or ask some kind of follow-up question. For example, during Sara's writer's workshops, it was not uncommon for multiple students to speak before Sara weighed in. The most extreme version of this was on display in Daniel's graded discussions. In these discussions, an hour might pass before Daniel would interject to

make some concluding remarks.[30] Outside of the writer's workshops and graded discussions, however, this was a remarkably rare practice; the teachers were far more likely to speak in between student utterances, even if just long to say, "Okay, good," and call on the next speaker. It is notable that the two places where I did see a lot of uninterrupted student talk—the writer's workshops and the graded discussions—were specifically structured by Sara and Daniel, respectively, to limit their talking and increase students' talking. This suggests that teachers (and, possibly, students) benefit from discussion structures that more explicitly reduce the teacher's centrality to the discussion.

As I note in Chapter 5, the graded discussion format grew out of Daniel's understanding of how hard it is for him to resist the urge to speak. I would generalize this out to the other teachers as well; the sheer amount of teacher talk that I observed suggests that regardless of dialogic intention, it remained difficult for the teachers to let go of their primacy to the intellectual and facilitative work of the discussion. Sometimes their talking was a response to the larger instructional context (see below in the section on attending to learning goals). Other times, it had the effect of shutting down further student talk—the opposite of drawing out students. Take the following exchange from one of Daniel's discussions:

> **Lucy:** I think he just can't accept that Daisy once loved Tom. He just wanted her to, like, renounce--
>
> **Daniel:** Yeah, tell me about that, cause that's, like, one of the big moments in the story, I mean, that's a crucial moment in the story. Tell me more, Lucy.

[30] Although he did write students' comments on the board, a move that likely helped to orient students to one another's ideas.

Lucy: Well, like, essentially, Tom, and Gatsby, Nick and Daisy were all in this hotel room with Jordan, and so, eventually, the tension builds up, and the two of them fight because Gatsby wanted Daisy to, like, "Daisy always loved me, she never loved you," and Tom was like, "That's a lie," and then Daisy's just like, "No, I don't want [Gatsby] to be here."

Daniel: Yeah, so, Gatsby, essentially, wants to erase everything that happened after Gatsby and Daisy broke up. He's basically trying to erase that entire time, and he's trying to say, "Nope. Never existed." And, of course, what's the biggest problem with that? What's the one proof? Bernice.

Bernice: They have a child.

Daniel: They have a kid! They have a kid. And do you remember how it's written when Gatsby meets the little girl?

Bernice: Didn't he just--

Daniel: Gatsby can't even look at her.

Bernice: Oh.

Daniel: Gatsby can't even look at the kid. Because that kid is the one, like, fundamental proof that Daisy left Gatsby and went off and married someone else. Like, it's the one piece that he can't erase, right, is this kid.

In this exchange, Lucy touches upon an idea that is clearly exciting to Daniel and that he has things to say about. He interrupts her before she can finish her initial comment to note that she's getting at something really important and urges her to continue. After Lucy's next comment, he does some rephrasing followed by a leading question. Bernice gives him the answer he's looking for, which leads to another leading question. This time

Daniel doesn't even wait to hear Bernice's answer. It's an interesting observation that Daniel ultimately makes about Gatsby's inability to look at Daisy's child, and I'm sure some students learned from it, but it pulls the discussion's center of gravity away from the students, which is the opposite of what he wants to accomplish. I suspect that if Daniel were to watch this segment of discussion, he would say what he said about a writing conference in which he was a little too directive: "This is me just talking too much."[31]

Here's another example of a teacher talking too much, this one from a discussion in Kathleen's class about Maya's feelings of guilt after her rapist, Mr. Freeman, is murdered:

> **Kathleen:** I know we talked about this in class before. Regardless of what somebody does, some people feel like you deserve to die for it, other people feel like you don't deserve death. Like, death is not our choice to make for someone else's life, right? So maybe Maya's also struggling with the fact that he died, maybe she feels like he didn't deserve to die. He could've rotted in jail, but was death right? How many of you think death was appropriate? Anyone? No one?
>
> **Student 2:** Well, I don't know…
>
> **Student 3:** Can I be in between?
>
> **Kathleen:** And sometimes it's hard because, like, when you think about it, you know, it's Maya's life, so I might say, no, Mr. Freeman, he didn't deserve to die. Yes, he should've went [sic] to jail. He should've been punished.

---

[31] In this, case, Daniel talks too much because his enthusiasm gets the better of him. This was not uncommon. And though it's important to point out how interrupting Bernice in the above excerpt contradicts some of Daniel's stated intentions, it's also worth noting that modeling enthusiasm for talking about books may have its own pedagogical value (not unrelated to leading good discussions).

Student 2: If someone did that to my kid--

Kathleen: But then if it's my kid, he deserves to die. It's always different when it directly affects you.

What is especially maddening about this excerpt is that the pieces are all there for a good discussion. The students understand the book, or at least enough of the book to engage in the discussion that she ultimately initiates about capital punishment. They're listening and attentive. She asks a good, open-ended question that seems well-designed to appeal to high school students. One student even begins to formulate a more complex kind of response: "Can I be in between?" But at every turn, Kathleen undercuts the discussion. She doesn't wait for students to gather their thoughts. She doesn't ask Student 3 to explain his thinking. She even talks over Student 2. In effect, she shuts down the discussion, pontificating on her own thinking, rather than drawing out the students' thinking. Although I spend more time in this dissertation on how the teachers successfully realized their dialogic intentions—if not fully, partially—there are contradictions in the data as well, places where the teachers acted in ways that subverted their intentions. Why they would do this, despite their stated commitment to dialogism, remains an open question, and warrants greater attention than I have been able to give it here.

Facilitation practices that orient students to one another

The teachers also enacted practices that oriented students to one another, by which I mean practices that supported students in listening and responding to one another. With respect to the four criteria of good discussions that I lay out in Chapter 2, the practices in this category are directed towards leading discussions that are "coherent,"

or discussions in which students' comments are in conversation with one another. In addition to creating discussion structures that scaffolded these behaviors—like Daniel's QARE system—the teachers actively nudged students to engage with their peers' ideas. The most common way the teachers did this was by restating or rephrasing students' comments. Restating was when the teachers repeated a student's comment word for word. Rephrasing was when they used their own words to sum up a student's comment.[32] In essence, by restating or rephrasing a student's comment, the teachers increased the comment's broadcast range, which, theoretically, increased the likelihood that another student would respond to it or incorporate it into his/her comment in some way. Here's an example of rephrasing from a discussion in Daniel's class:

> **Daniel:** [Myrtle's] is a really graphic death. It's a very graphic death. [Fitzgerald] describes it brutally. Why? Lauren?
>
> **Lauren:** I think it's because he's trying to tell the reader that, even though it's a fictional text, it's still, like, a hard thing.
>
> **Daniel:** That it matters. That it's still important. And difficult. Yes, Ana.
>
> **Ana:** It's also to emphasize, like, exactly what they did. It wasn't like, oh, they hit a body and now there's a body lying on the ground. It's a body torn open.
>
> **Daniel:** So the details make it unambiguous as to how horrific it was. Our mind is not allowed to say, oh, it wasn't that bad. Good. Ruby.
>
> **Ruby:** Okay, so I think that the way she died is sort of metaphorical because, like, it explains that her chest is, like, ripped open…

[32] This is referred to as "reformulating" in the literature (Wells & Arauz, 2006), but I call it "rephrasing" because it's a more straightforward term.

Rather than standing as independent answers to Daniel's original question, both Ana's and Ruby's responses build on what came before. The word "also" in Ana's response signals that she believes she is adding on to Lauren's response (or to Daniel's rephrasing). Her add-on is that the graphic description of Myrtle's death doesn't just tell the reader how to feel about the death—Lauren's point—it also tells the reader how to feel about what "they"—Daisy and Gatsby—did. Lastly, Ruby builds on Ana's response by arguing that there is metaphorical meaning in the description of Myrtle's "torn" open body.

Would these students have built on one another's responses if Daniel had remained silent instead? Perhaps.[33] Nor does rephrasing guarantee that subsequent speakers will take up their peers' ideas. Regardless, by crystallizing Lauren's and Ana's responses, Daniel annotates the discussion for the benefit of all of the students. For example, Lauren's comment that Myrtle's death is "a hard thing" stands on its own. But Daniel takes her comment and makes it even more impactful by offering three slight variations on her idea and putting feeling into his delivery: "That it matters. That it's still important. And difficult." In effect, he acts out the feeling that Lauren argues Fitzgerald wanted the reader to feel about Myrtle's death. It is the verbal equivalent of putting an exclamation point next to her comment. Another goal of Daniel's when rephrasing was "to recast [a student's comment] into slightly more literary vocabulary," i.e., to say the student's idea "in a more technical, academic way." And so, in his rephrasing of Ana's comment above, he introduces the word "unambiguous" to describe Fitzgerald's

[33] Comments less readily intelligible than Lauren's and Lucy's comments—i.e., comments that are very long or unclear or particularly sophisticated—may make more obvious candidates for some concise and student-friendly rephrasing.

rendering of Myrtle's death, which is really just a fancy way to say what Ana just said. Other times he reframed a student's comment so that students could more clearly see how it contributed to the debate (if there was a debate). All of these techniques help students to "hear" their classmate's comment, but they also orient the discussion towards learning goals. A final point on rephrasing: it requires that teachers listen deeply to what students are saying so that in their rephrasing, they do not misrepresent the student's comment or alter it so much that it no longer resembles the original comment.

A practice that I saw less of but that also oriented students to one another was directly asking students to extend or respond to another student's comment, what Barker (2015) calls "posting." Here is an example (in italics) from a discussion in Kathleen's class about the meaning of the title of Maya Angelou's memoir.

> **Kathleen:** Alright, somebody raise your hand and give me one idea why you think this is a fitting title. Travis.
>
> **Travis:** Because, uh, when she was younger and she was, like, not comfortable.
>
> **Kathleen:** Okay.
>
> **Travis:** A bird in a cage. Not comfortable.
>
> **Kathleen:** Okay. [Writes on the board, "Uncomfortable like a bird in a cage."] If you don't have this, write it. Whether you use it or not, or you like it or you agree, just put it down 'cause it can trigger other thoughts or discussion. So she was uncomfortable like a bird in a cage. So throughout her life she had either uncomfortable experiences or felt uncomfortable just like a bird probably feels uncomfortable in a cage. Right? Jada?
>
> **Jada:** She was uncomfortable with her appearance.

Kathleen: Okay, and so how does the title fit that?

Jada: Um.

Kathleen: *Can someone help her?* Serena.

Serena: A bird that's locked away is unhappy.

Kathleen: Okay, a bird that's locked away is unhappy.

In this brief excerpt, Kathleen employs a variety of moves that might support students in taking up one another's ideas. She uses both restating and rephrasing. She writes a slightly rephrased version of Travis' comment down on the board, instructing students to write it down in their notes.[34] When Jada struggles to answer Kathleen's clarification question—"So how does the title fit that?"—Kathleen asks other students to jump in and help Jada. In response, Serena offers that Maya's discomfort with her appearance might make her unhappy, the way a bird "that's locked away is unhappy." It's not the most sophisticated response, but it does connect Jada's comment to the title more explicitly. A more fruitful line of questioning might have had Jada first warrant her claim about Maya's discomfort with her appearance, surfacing some ideas about how people feel trapped in their bodies, before bringing it back to the title. Nevertheless, Kathleen makes a series of moves in this short exchange that increase the chances of a coherent discussion, including explicitly inviting other students to help Jada out.

The Practices: Attending to learning goals

As I've noted throughout this chapter, the teachers also acted in ways that seemed to contradict their stated goals of dialogism—in particular their conceptualization of an "open" discussion in which students are permitted a great deal of freedom to follow their

[34] This was a strategy that Daniel used during graded discussions as well. He recorded almost every student comment on the board, a move that I suspect aided students in responding to one another.

own intellectual inclinations. My initial response to these seeming contradictions between the teachers' orientations and their practices was disappointment. I had hoped to see discussions that looked more like the image of an ideal discussion that I carried around in my head and that they themselves described, which is to say, a discussion in which students generate most of the content and do most of the talking, not unlike the description of Ms. Z.'s discussion with which I begin this dissertation. In the discussions I observed over the course of this study, however, the teachers did a great deal of the talking. Sometimes this talking was consistent with the literature's description of "uptake"—that is, contributions that directly build on ideas offered by the students. But sometimes it was not. It was the teacher inserting their own ideas, and, arguably, co-opting the dialogic space from students. In the following section, I make the case that many of these teacher-generated episodes were not fundamentally anti-dialogic, but represented a compromise between the teachers' goals of leading a discussion that was student-generated and leading a discussion was focused on learning goals.

Discussion excerpt from Kevin's class

This excerpt is taken from a discussion about *Lord of the Flies* during which Kevin asks the students to consider three questions: 1) Why is Jack unable to kill the pig? 2) How do you think he feels about himself? 3) How do you feel about the fact that he didn't kill the pig? This exchange occurs late in the discussion during the final ten minutes of class:

> **Kevin:** Let me ask this question. How many of y'all, if right now you were starving, mad starving, and you, like, hadn't eaten meat in a long time—you'd really like yourself some pig meat—and a little pig came squealing in here and sat

right in front of you, and all you had to do was cut its throat and you could eat that pig--

S1: Oh, for sure.

Kevin: Raise your hand if you think you're capable of doing it?

[Lots of talking. Kevin counts the raised hands.]

Kevin: Alright, so a bunch of y'all.

[Kevin allows the side conversations to continue for a few moments. He listens in on one of the conversations.]

Kevin: [in response to what he hears one student say] Oh no, it's not a question of survival. It's a question of you want that meat.

[A couple of students say, "I want that meat!" The side conversations continue.]

Kevin: On some level [pauses while students quiet down]…on some level, this is the fundamental question of this book. What is our instinct as humans? Is Jack--is the only think holding Jack back from killing that pig custom and the influence of the culture that he's from? Or is what's holding him back something inside of him and instinct to empathize with this other creature? Because this is really the heart of the matter that Golding's going towards in this book. What is human nature? Are we, at heart, violent creatures that are only restrained by the rules we make up for ourselves?

S2: Yeah.

Kevin: Or are we, at heart, creatures who are, at nature, non-violent, and sometimes we do get into conflict and things happen, but we're really non-violent people when it comes down to it.

S3: We're animals.

Kevin: And that's an interesting question for us to think about because everywhere we look around the world right now, we see conflict, right. And we see somebody going to a playground in Pakistan where kids are on the swings, right, and detonating a bomb to kill sixty of them. Right, we're seeing that.

[A student asks her neighbor, "What happened?"]

Kevin: We see people fighting, we see wars happening, we see people beheading people, you know, on the Internet. These things happen. We know the Holocaust happened, with millions of people killed, right. On the other hand, how many people in this classroom right now, without any provocation, could just turn to someone right next to you and just punch them in the face?

[Some laughter and students raising their hands.]

Kevin: [smiling] You really think--you really think you could?

[Two students get up and pretend to punch each other in the face.]

Kevin: You think you could, Joey?

Joey: Yeah.

Kevin: You really think you could?

[Multiple students talking.]

Kevin: Really? Because it's important to think about this. Yes, there is a lot of conflict in the world. There is a lot of violence, a lot of murder, a lot of war. But there are eight billion people on this planet. Everyday, they interact with each other, billions and billions of times. How many of those interactions are violent? And how many are peaceful? Right, so, this is the key question that Golding is

bringing up in this book and for you to think about. What are we like in our nature? Is it natural for us to be violent or not, right? And I think that's, like, what's going to come up throughout this story.

Far from being student-generated, almost all of the content in this discussion excerpt is generated by Kevin. To put it simply, he talks a lot. But does this make it a bad discussion? Does Kevin abandon dialogism completely? It bears repeating that this excerpt is taken from a much longer discussion during which students do generate a good deal of the discussion's content. It was a student who first suggested that "custom and the influence of culture" held Jack back from killing the pig. Moreover, the students *are* talking in this excerpt, responding animatedly to Kevin's hypothetical scenarios. Although we are not privy to the substance of the conversations that students are having with their neighbors, we do get a general sense of where many of them stand with regards to the hypotheticals Kevin poses, or at least where they'd like to think they stand.

Though I did not confirm this with Kevin, he seems caught off guard by how cavalier his students are about committing acts of violence. When he presents the hypothetical about punching somebody in the face without provocation, he does so because he is trying to make the point that there are things that hold us back from behaving violently. Instead, that point is lost in his students' declared readiness to punch somebody. These are adolescent boys, after all, and I wonder if his other classes, which had a larger female presence, had a more mixed response. I linger on this point because it is possible that Kevin's talking is a response to the fact that the hypotheticals did not generate from students what he hoped they would—that is, a serious interrogation of their capacities for violence. Since the overwhelming response from this boy-heavy class is,

yes, they are totally ready to spill some blood, Kevin cannot build on those ideas to ask the question he wants to ask—what holds us back from being violent, custom or nature? So instead he just asks it, and goes on to explain why it is a difficult question to answer.

This gives the discussion the appearance of being almost completely driven by Kevin's agenda, and, therefore, less dialogic. I don't dispute the first part of that sentence. Kevin planned this discussion about Jack's inability to kill the pig with the intention of arriving at this very question. In this sense, it was never his intention for this discussion to be completely open-ended. He creates space for some more open-ended talking and wondering (especially earlier in the discussion), but for the discussion to accomplish his goals, it must surface this question about human nature, which, importantly, is not just a question that Kevin identifies as the central question of the book, but is commonly regarded as such. If a class were to read *Lord of the Flies* without considering this question, it would be hard to make a case that they read the book very carefully or thoughtfully. On the matrix of possible instructional purposes for discussion that I propose, this discussion would fall in the lower left quadrant, representing a kind of dialogic inquiry that is focused on conventional interpretations of the text. It is not, in other words, intended to be a space for students to freely pursue whatever is on their minds; rather, it is intended to direct students' thinking and talking towards some very specific interpretive territory. With that instructional purpose in mind, it might be okay for a teacher, at some point, to really take control. When Kevin's students demonstrate an inability to seriously consider what it would take, on their part, to kill a pig or punch a random classmate, he strong-arms the discussion back to where he wants it to go. Perhaps he could've spent some time respectfully pushing back against his students' avowed

capacities for violence, but since they were in the final ten minutes of class, it is possible he did not have time to do that *and* introduce the book's central theme.[35]

In sum, although Kevin does a lot of talking in this discussion excerpt—a fact that might lead some to question its claim to dialogism—a closer look suggests that it would be overly purist to conclude that this makes it a bad discussion or not a discussion at all. Instead, I offer that it confounds the monologic/dialogic dichotomy. It is certainly not recitation; Kevin is not checking to see if his students have the right answer. Nor can it be fairly categorized as a lecture, given the amount of dialogue that occurs throughout the excerpt. Students are not just learning from Kevin; they are listening to and learning from each other, for better or worse. It's also important to note that Kevin never answers the question that he poses about human nature. He presents evidence from the real world that might be used to support a couple of positions on the matter, but leaves it open for students to consider, and, possibly, for future discussion. On the other hand, it is true that Kevin generates most of the content during this part of the discussion and that he delivers this content in the form of a monologue. Yet, he does this not with the intention of telling students what they should think, but to steer them towards one of the big questions that the book asks. Recall that Bakhtin (1984) refers to monologism as "deaf to the other's response." Far from that being the case here, Kevin's "monologuing" is both a response to what the students have generated so far and a preview of a discussion they will continue to have. In short, he adapts the activity of discussion to accommodate his specific learning goals and his specific students.

Discussion excerpt from Kathleen's class

[35] It may also be that those hypotheticals were poorly conceived in the first place, at least for this particular group of students, and pursuing them further would have led further in a direction he did not want to go.

This excerpt is from a discussion about *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* during which the students discuss a moment in the book when Maya's mother, Vivian, makes the unusual choice to wake Maya and her brother up at 2:30 in the morning. It directly follows reading the passage in which this occurs:

Kathleen: So what did Vivian do?

S1: She threw, like, a little party.

Kathleen: Yeah, she threw Maya and Bailey a party. Made them cookies and a pot of milk chocolate to dip 'em in. Okay, now, the thing I want you think about is, why do you think Vivian threw a party just for Maya and Bailey like this? Denise?

Denise: She probably wanted to just spend time with them.

Kathleen: Okay, maybe she wanted to spend time with them. What else?

S2: Show them that she appreciated them.

Kathleen: Show them that she appreciated them.

S1: She wants them to be happy.

Kathleen: She wants them to be happy. Okay. What about the past though? That might cause her to do this?

S3: Probably feels bad.

Kathleen: Yeah, maybe she feels bad. Maybe she's making up for lost time. She didn't get to spend their childhood with them as their mother. But why 2:30 in the morning?

S4: 'Cause everybody was asleep.

Kathleen: Okay, everybody else was sleeping. So she's singing and dancing in the kitchen with them. So these are dance steps, dances that people used to do. They're not like the twerk and the stanky leg and the, whatever you guys do. [Laughter.] They are called the time step, the Suzy-Q, and the snakehips.

S1: What is the Suzy-Q?

Kathleen: I have no idea what the Suzy-Q is.

S5: What about the snakehips?

Kathleen: The snakehips I'm assuming you just kinda wiggle your hips [does a quick demonstration].

[A student tries it out in his seat. Laughter.]

Kathleen: These were all appropriate dances [smiles knowingly].

[More laughter.]

Kathleen: So, would that be cool? Mom wakes you up, like, "I made cookies and chocolate to dip 'em in"?

[Multiple students talking, most saying, "Yes."]

Kathleen: Like, wouldn't that make you feel special? Like, "I threw a party just for you."

[A student says, "Yeah."]

Kathleen: Did Maya and Bailey ever have a birthday party that we know of?

[Multiple students saying, "No."]

Kathleen: No.

[Kathleen directs students to the next passage she wants to talk about.]

In this brief exchange, Kathleen moves from a question about the plot—"What did Vivian do?"—to a more open-ended question about character motivation—"Why did Vivian [do this]?" She cues students that she is moving into a more discussion-like mode with the phrase "Okay, now, the thing I want you think about is…" The first thing the reader will probably notice about this excerpt, aside from the fact that Kathleen and the students seem to be genuinely enjoying one another, is that although Kathleen asks an open-ended question, she ultimately leads students to an answer that was in her head before she asked the question, which is that Vivian throws the party because she's trying to make up for missing Maya and Bailey's childhood. How, then, one might ask, is this different from recitation, or I-R-E (Initiation-Response-Evaluation)?

Here is how Nystrand (1997) defines recitation:

> The teacher asks a series of unrelated questions in order to assess how much students know and do not know, as well as to check completion of assigned work and to reinforce key points. . . .When recitation starts, remembering and guessing supplant student thinking.

With that definition as a guide, I want to note several ways in which the above excerpt departs from recitation. First, the questions that Kathleen asks are not unrelated. *"Why do you think Vivian threw a party just for Maya and Bailey like this?" What about the past though?" "Why 2:30 in the morning?"* She concludes with a series of questions that ask the students to imagine how Maya and Bailey might have felt. Each question builds on what came before, moving students towards a deeper understanding of the text. Admittedly, students are not left to come to this understanding completely on their own, but are directed there by Kathleen. This makes for a discussion that is significantly less

student-generated. At the same time, Kathleen's primary goal does not seem to be one of open-ended inquiry. On the matrix of possible instructional purposes for discussion, I would argue that this discussion falls in the lower right quadrant, representing a more closed-ended kind of inquiry in which the teacher uses discussion to surface and sharpen basic understandings of the text. It's important to remember that these are "general ed" 9th graders encountering a challenging text for the first time. Since it is difficult to fully understand Vivian's motivations without taking into consideration the family history, and since the students' initial responses do not make explicit reference to this history, Kathleen directs the class there. Despite this directedness, she stops short of quizzing the students on their understanding. She takes three responses to her question about Vivian's motivation without communicating any sort of evaluation. At no point do the students shift into a mode of, as Nystrand says, "remembering and guessing." Rather, I would describe what the students are doing as directed thinking.

Although I am arguing that this discussion excerpt remains an example of dialogism despite its teacher-generated-ness, I do think there are missed opportunities for a more robust dialogism that bear mentioning. Specifically, Kathleen misses a number of opportunities to ask clarification questions. I especially wish she would've asked Student 3 to clarify what she meant when she said Vivian "probably feels bad." Instead, Kathleen builds off of this comment to make her point about Vivian trying to make up for missing Maya and Bailey's childhood. It is quite possible that Student 3, or some other student, could have generated this idea. Relatedly, I am interested to know why Student 4 thinks it is important that everyone else in the house was asleep. Why wouldn't Vivian want the other family members to be present at the party? It's a suggestive detail, and one that

Kathleen elicits by asking, "Why 2:30 in the morning?" but that she doesn't take up. Even in the context of this more directed and closed-ended inquiry, I think there was ample space for more student-generated thinking and talking.

Discussion excerpt from Daniel's class

This excerpt is from a discussion about *The Great Gatsby* during which the students describe the various romantic relationships in the book and consider what F. Scott Fitzgerald might be saying about love:

Daniel: What are other relationships? Olivia.

Olivia: Well there's, of course, Tom and Myrtle. At first [inaudible] we all thought that maybe he didn't really care about her and he was just using her or something. But then, like, as we see, like, later in the last chapters that maybe he actually had some sentimental feelings for her, and that he actually did care, but he just didn't show it on his face, and that deep down he did actually really value her.

Daniel: Okay, so, well [pause, looks up at the ceiling], I have to, I have to question you more about that, alright, because, Chapter Two, alright, why are they together in the first place?

[A student asks, "Who?" and another student responds "Myrtle and Tom."]

Daniel: Yeah, Myrtle and Tom. What are each getting out of it?

Olivia: Well…

S1: Tom's getting pleasure. [Daniel nods approvingly.]

Olivia: Well, Tom's getting pleasure, but I don't think Myrtle--

Daniel: Tom's getting--[turning to the rest of the class] What's Myrtle getting?

[Multiple students say, “Money.”]

Daniel: Money, money. Pleasure, money. Can we call this love?

[Multiple students say, “No.”]

Daniel: That’s right. Guys, as a pure aside, life lesson here. If the person you’re dating hits you, it’s not love, and it never will be love, and please remember that, alright? It’s never love. If there’s violence, that’s never love. Move. Leave, Go. That’s it.

This is a moment where Daniel hears a comment that he perceives not only as a misunderstanding, but as a dangerous misunderstanding. Olivia offers that maybe Tom’s behavior at the end of the book suggests that he really did care for Myrtle after all (without mention of the fact that Tom broke her nose earlier). This response doesn’t sit well with Daniel and he tells her as much, both with his pause and his words—“I have to question you more about that.” The question he ultimately asks—“What are [Myrtle and Tom] getting out of [the relationship]?”—is the kind of question that appears open-ended in the sense that it is a question about a complex relationship that could sustain a discussion of its own. I would argue, however, that Daniel doesn’t ask it in an open-ended way. He asks it in order to make a point, which is that a relationship rooted in selfishness—on both lovers’ parts—cannot be called love. Once he hears the answers he wants to hear and is able to establish that it is not love between Tom and Myrtle, he addresses, in the form of a brief monologue, what he perceives to be the real danger lurking in Olivia’s claim—the notion that an abuser might be capable of genuinely caring for the person they abuse.

The larger discussion from which this exchange is taken is considerably more open-ended than what we see here. It remains bounded by Daniel's questions and, therefore, focused on some specific ideas widely regarded as central to understanding the book—see the lower left quadrant of the instructional purpose matrix—but still affords students significant interpretive autonomy. In this part of the discussion, however, Daniel's purpose shifts. What prompts this shift is the possibility that Olivia or some other student might walk away from this class thinking that an abusive relationship might still be a loving one. Although it goes against Daniel's pedagogical and disciplinary commitments to narrow the range of possible interpretations of a text, he hears an interpretation that he cannot allow to just hang there and possibly go unchallenged. So he intervenes, moving into a more closed-ended mode of dialogic inquiry—see the lower right quadrant of the instructional purpose matrix—and directing students to what he believes is a more accurate (i.e., text-based) assessment of Tom and Myrtle's relationship. It's important to note here that despite the directedness of this exchange, Daniel does not end or shut down the larger discussion; the question of what Fitzgerald is trying to say about love is still very much open. Finally, he tells his students in no uncertain terms that a person who truly loves them will never hit them, urging them not to fall into an abusive trap (like Myrtle does). Daniel did not anticipate taking over the discussion in this manner, but when Olivia makes her comment, he feels professionally obligated to intervene, and in such a way that leaves no doubt as to the meaning he wants students to walk away with. In essence, a new learning goal arises that demands a less open-ended approach.

Discussion excerpt from Sara's class

This excerpt is from a discussion on the Jamaica Kincaid short story "Girl" during which the students discuss questions they came up with in their table groups. It occurs during the final minutes of class:

Sara: We have time for one more group's question. Cassie.

Cassie: What does the author want in result of this story?

Sara: You mean the narrator.

Cassie: Yeah, the narrator.

Sara: What does the narrator want as a result of all these things?

S1: Or maybe it's like, does this narrator really want some kind of, like, result from this?

Sara: Does the narrator want a result? And what is it? Good question. David.

David: A well brought up girl.

Sara: [scare quotes] A well brought up girl. Xenia.

Xenia: How to be a lady.

Sara: [scare quotes] How to be a lady. [pause] Thomas.

Thomas: How to not be a disappointment.

Sara: Ooooh. How to not be a disappointment. Right? "Don't you throw rocks at blackbirds!"

[Multiple students talking.]

Sara: Now, the title, first hour suggested it could be "How to Be a Girl." "How to Be a Girl." In the past, we have done some imitation writing about this. What would the story sound like if the title was "Boy"?

[Multiple students respond.]

David: It would have been shorter.

Sara: It would have been short. What would be in the list?

[Multiple students respond.]

Thomas: How to build stuff? I don't know.

Sara: Build stuff.

S2: Stereotypical male, how to [inaudible].

[Sara laughs along with students.]

Sara: [following a brief pause] There's a lot of interesting stuff happening in this story.

This discussion begins with Sara eliciting questions from the students. This places the discussion firmly in the upper left quadrant of the instructional purposes matrix, representing open-ended dialogic inquiry in which the teacher provides comparatively little direction. Here Sara even enlists students to generate the question, indicating a strong commitment to the student-generated-ness of the discussion. However, she remains central to what transpires. She steps in right away to correct Cassie's mischaracterization of the speaker of the story as the author. She restates the students' responses, encouraging a more coherent discussion (see how the students' comments seem to build on one another rather than existing in isolation). Since it is the final minutes of class, Sara does not allow this more open-ended part of the discussion to go on for very long.[36] Instead, she inserts a question that directs students to more explicitly consider the gendered nature of the speaker's imperatives—"What would the story sound like if the title was 'Boy'"? This question does not come out of nowhere; it builds on the

[36] There are missed opportunities for Sara to probe her students' initial responses, though it may be that she chooses not to because of a lack of time.

students' previous responses. Still, it is her question, not the students'.[37] In this way, her instructional purpose shifts from one of open-ended inquiry to a more targeted kind of inquiry focused on conventional interpretations.[38] She directs the class to some specific interpretive terrain, and although time does not permit the discussion to go on long enough to really generate much substance, they are set up to do that work in the next class. As in the above example from Daniel's class, Sara's relative control over the discussion—and the quantity and quality of her talking—depends on her learning goal, which, in turn, is not static but evolves in response to other instructional variables (e.g., timing, what students are saying/doing, etc.).

It is useful to note again that, in the literature, and, I think, in the public imagination, discussion is often placed in opposition to teacher-centered methods like lecture and I-R-E. Oftentimes there is a value judgment attached to this dichotomy—i.e., teacher talking bad, student talking good. From this perspective, any teacher talking represents a diminished form of dialogism, if not imperiling its claim to dialogism completely. The teachers in this study suggest an alternative interpretation. Specifically, they suggest that dialogism need not (and, perhaps, depending on the larger instructional context, should not) be completely devoid of substantive teacher talk, and that the profession's conceptualization of dialogism might benefit from a less narrow conceptualization of the teacher's role during discussions. The discussions excerpted above are thoroughly infused with teacher-generated content. However, the teachers' interventions do not seek to be, as Bakhtin (1984) writes about monologism, "the ultimate word," so much as they seek to direct students' thinking and talking in a more

[37] Although if we take her at her word, it was generated by students in a previous class.

[38] "Conventional" in the sense that societal expectations for women versus men is generally considered to be one of the story's central themes.

educationally purposeful direction—which is to say, towards the learning goals. Moreover, they are responsive to what students have said already and anticipate what they might say later. They have a past and future, whereas truly monologic discourse, as Bakhtin defines it, is out of time, and, therefore, might be plopped down in the middle of any class with any group of students. For these reasons, I argue that the teachers do not contradict their stated orientations towards students and learning in the above excerpts, but, rather, deploy teacher-generated discourse dialogically. Are the discussions less student-generated because of the amount of teacher talk? Yes. Are they more focused on learning goals? Again, I would say, yes. There is no golden rule for how a teacher should manage this tension. However, I would argue that a conceptualization of discussion that does not admit the possibility of significant teacher-generated discourse fails to account for the role of learning goals in how a discussion unfolds.

The Practices: Concluding the discussion

By and large, the teachers ended their discussions with a few words to bring the discussion to a close. They did not just move into the next activity (or the end of the class) without marking the transition in some way. Sometimes, for example, the teachers would summarize disciplinary goals that were achieved during the discussion. Here Daniel concludes the discussion about Myrtle's death:

> **Daniel:** Allegory! Guys, when you can identify allegories like that, you are right next to author's purpose, alright? When you can find an allegory like that and describe it, as Ruby did very well, you're right there at author's purpose. And considering things like the death of Myrtle is not just literally horrifying but metaphorically important, alright? These are ideas that you need to be constantly

thinking about when you're reading literature. I would, in fact, start thinking about the allegory of the green light.

Other times, they used the conclusion to explicitly connect the discussion to future work, as Sara does here after the discussion about "Letter to God":

> **Sara:** I sincerely hope you did figure some things out. If you choose to write about this story, I would like you to make sure you give it a third and probably a fourth read. We're going to talk about all of the stories again on Friday.

Following a discussion about who gets to use certain epithets—a discussion that was not directly related to *Lord of the Flies*—Kevin used the conclusion to make a connection to the text:

> **Kevin:** Yeah, it's interesting to talk about. Like I said, these dehumanizing terms come up in the book, right? Because, you know, Piggy already doesn't have a real name. He's just Piggy. And that's what they're hunting, right? They're hunting pigs on that island.

On another occasion, Kevin connects some ideas about leadership that came up during a discussion about *Lord of the Flies* to the 2016 presidential election. What seems to hold all of these conclusions together is connection. In all four of the above examples, the teachers connect the discussion to something outside or beyond the content of the discussion, whether that means disciplinary goals, future work, the text, or the world. They make transparent the ways in which the discussions are not self-standing or merely a fun/painful way to pass five minutes, but are related to other work and other ideas.

Content knowledge and knowledge of students

In this final section, I discuss the impact that content knowledge and knowledge of students may have had on the teachers' practices. I cannot in these few pages do justice to the enormity of this topic; however, it would be an omission not to at least gesture towards the relationship between teachers' knowledge and leading good discussions. To illuminate this relationship, I present a particularly problematic discussion from Kathleen's class. In this discussion, Kathleen prompts students to discuss the following quote from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: "The needs of a society determine its ethics." It's a challenging quote, but is rendered even more so by the fact that Kathleen removes it from its context (and, in fact, from the sentence of which it is a part). Here it is in its full context (Angelou, 1969):

> The needs of a society determine its ethics, and in the Black American ghettos the hero is that man who is offered only the crumbs from his country's table but by ingenuity and courage is able to take for himself a Lucullan feast. Hence the janitor who lives in one room but sports a robin's-egg-blue Cadillac is not laughed at but admired, and the domestic who buys forty-dollar shoes is not criticized but is appreciated. We know that they have put to use their full mental and physical powers. Each single gain feeds into the gains of the body collective.

What Angelou means by "The needs of a society determine its ethics" becomes a little clearer in light of what follows. By using words like "ingenuity" and "courage" we see that Maya looks favorably upon the janitor's successful procurement of a Cadillac. Although buying a Cadillac might be perceived by some as a frivolous purchase, Maya argues that for Black Americans born into a deeply racist and unjust society, such

material “excess” represents a hard-fought victory to be celebrated by the entire community.

I provide this context because Kathleen takes a very different meaning from the text, and as the discussion progresses, it becomes clear that Kathleen has no intention of letting students come to their own understanding of the quote. In short, she believes that Angelou is making a commentary on how Black Americans unwisely perceive unnecessary material possessions as needs, and adjust their ethics accordingly to meet those needs. After several minutes of unsuccessfully trying to lead students to her interpretation of the quote, she tells them her interpretation outright:

> **Kathleen:** [Maya’s] saying that the needs of the African-American society, it’s all about your looks and what you have to show. Your car. Your shoes. Your sunglasses. Your name-brand everything. And the fact that those are your needs, your ethics will go down in order to get those things.

To put it plainly, Kathleen could not get it any more wrong. Her reading of the quote is diametrically opposed to Angelou’s intended meaning. Moreover, she betrays her belief in a common racist stereotype about the frivolousness and related unscrupulousness of African-Americans. This stereotype becomes the lens through which she interprets Angelou’s words, reading the quote as confirmation of the stereotype’s truth, rather than as a direct challenge to the stereotype.

Kathleen continues to push her interpretation despite the fact that her students were actively challenging the stereotype that she was unwittingly engaging in. Take this exchange:

Kathleen: If somebody needs something, say, what do people do if they need a car and they can't afford one?

S1: They borrow one.

Kathleen: They borrow it. Or they steal it, right? Car-jacking. You hear about car-jackings a lot?

And, later, this:

Kathleen: So, to put it in just our school society, I see it all the time, your need to have a pencil for class causes your ethics to go down and therefore you steal one.

S2: Or you take one off the ground.

In Kathleen's mind, the quote confirms her belief that her students are prone to making bad or dangerous life decisions in pursuit of what they believe they need, and she wants to urge them to choose a wiser path. She has a very narrow agenda for this discussion, and since, in her mind, it is a righteous agenda, she proceeds even when students are saying things that directly contradict the assumptions of that agenda (not to mention her interpretation of the quote). It is disheartening to see a high school English teacher promote such a clear misreading of a text. It is crushing to see a teacher of Black children—and one who, from what I could see, has earned the trust and respect of her students—perpetuate a stereotype that demeans and criminalizes those children.

Towards the end of the discussion, a student, Demetrius, asked if it would ever be "good" to sell drugs, the kind of complicated question I think the quote might actually be driving at. Kathleen's response was to give him a harsh look and say, "Why would selling drugs be good?" She goes on enumerate the dangers of drug-dealing. Instead of

engaging Demetrius' question, she takes it as an opportunity to, as she would say to me later, "be real":

> I want to be a role model and give my students sound advice. I do not want Demetrius or any other of my kids to think that it is respectable to go out and sell drugs to make extra income for things you want. I want to instill in them pride for who they are and what they can do with hard work. So often these stereotypes are glorified and drug dealing gets you nice cars, designer clothes, and pockets of cash, but I will never support or glorify that to my students. I support them being positive and productive members of society who need to surpass the stereotypes because they're ridiculous to begin with. This is one of those moments to be real with the students and show them that I understand their thoughts, but know they are capable of much more and I expect much more from them. (Kathleen, Stimulated Recall)

Ironically, in her attempt to support her students in avoiding falling prey to stereotypes, she reduces her students to those stereotypes. Demetrius becomes the confused young Black man who needs to be saved from a life of drug-dealing when really he was just asking a complicated question about morality, a question that was suggested to him by the very book Kathleen assigned and that they're reading together.

A want of content knowledge and knowledge of students are on full display in this discussion. In truth, it is hard to parse the two. The stereotype that Kathleen brings to the text and that blinds her to a more sophisticated interpretation also blinds her to her students. If Kathleen had been a better reader in that moment, perhaps she would have come to an interpretation more in line with the complex set of ideas Angelou was trying

to communicate (internalized stereotype notwithstanding). If she had deeper, truer knowledge of her students, perhaps she would have long abandoned such sweeping and racist generalizations about what motivates them. Relatedly, Kathleen doesn't allow the students to do any of their own interpretive work. She has a predetermined interpretation of the quote and her questions are all intended to lead students to that very interpretation. Her goal to "be a role model and give [her] students sound advice" completely undercuts the dialogic quality of the discussion. Since she assumes that they—as Black Americans—are misguided, she takes it upon herself to guide them. This is a good example of how content knowledge, knowledge of students, and learning goals might intersect to affect a teacher's enactment of discussion. There is much more to say about this relationship, and, indeed, it is underexplored area in this dissertation. I intend to pursue this line of inquiry more fully in future research or in subsequent iterations of this work.

Discussion

At the risk of sounding a little like a car commercial, discussion was both the vehicle and the destination for the participating teachers. It was a way to get students to engage in the kind of idea-building and critical reflection, that, ultimately, the teachers wanted the students to be able to do on their own, but it was also the culmination of a great deal of work intended to prepare students to participate successfully in discussions. All of the practices described above are directed towards getting students to talk and listen to one another, and through their talking and listening, do text-based interpretive work together.

In the introduction to this chapter, I said that practices have orientations. Consider the orientation of asking clarification questions. First and foremost, it requires listening. Not listening to determine if the student's answer is right or wrong. But listening to understand why the student thinks what they think. Listening to determine what follow-up question(s) to ask to help the student to say the thing he/she wants to say in the clearest way possible. I don't think this is a practice that can be faked, at least not for long. To listen in this way, a teacher truly has to care what their students think and why they think it. This orientation is embodied in the very practice of asking clarification questions.

Listening may just be the practice that connects all of the practices. I don't see how a teacher could possibly lead a discussion without being a good listener. In fact, all of the facilitation practices enumerated above—drawing out students, orienting students to one another, and building on students' ideas—depend on the teacher's ability to listen well. As a teacher educator, this is a scary notion. How do we teach teachers to listen? Even more to the point, how do we teach teachers to listen when they have a dozen other things (at least) they are keeping track of while they are listening? A teacher's brain is nothing if not busy.

One last point: there are certainly other practices (and sub-practices) pertinent to leading good discussions that I do not discuss in this chapter. In some cases, that's because I didn't see those practices in the small sample of discussions that I observed. In other cases, it's because I had to make choices about where to direct my seeing. I tried to use the teachers' words to guide this seeing and to focus on practices that most clearly supported the teachers' goals for discussions, but I have no doubt that I missed some

practices. Just because I didn't see or write about a practice doesn't mean that it's not an important practice or even that the participating teachers did not do that practice.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this dissertation, I attempt to provide a relatively comprehensive portrait of what the participating teachers did to lead discussions and what they said about leading discussions. Specifically, I argue that, for the participating teachers, leading discussions rests on the sustained enactment of broadly dialogic teaching practices that advance and are founded upon respectful relationships with students. Though the teachers differed in the specific practices they enacted, they were united by an orientation towards students that was deeply affirming of students' intelligence and personhood, and an underlying ambition to share authority with students. Sometimes the teachers acted in ways that appeared monologic—and, thus, at odds with their orientations—but that a closer look revealed to be in keeping with their dialogic goals. I realize that this assertion—particularly the first part—is so broad as to register as somewhat obvious and, thus, not particularly clarifying. However, I hope that the close-ups—on the teachers' respect for students, on the teachers' commitment to sharing authority, and on the teachers' carefully integrated practices—has sufficiently illuminated its subcomponent and more actionable parts.

The word "actionable" is important here. This is because my primary goal in writing this dissertation was to demystify this very difficult but important practice of leading discussions, not for demystification's sake, but in order to better support teachers in learning how to lead discussions. As I noted, discussions are not very common in American classrooms, and I hypothesized that one reason they're not very common is

because they're so hard to do well. I saw in Ms. Z.—the teacher with whom I open my introduction—evidence of expert practice that I didn't fully understand and that I didn't think was adequately accounted for in the literature. And so I set out to learn from other veteran teachers like her.

What, then, are the implications of this study for preparing teachers to lead discussions? For one, it is crucially important that I felt the need to give two chapters to the sociocultural component of leading discussions. This was something I did not anticipate, and, in fact, only accepted once it became clear that I could not treat fully the teachers' practices of giving respect and sharing authority in the same chapter. There was just too much in the data to fit it all into a single chapter. For these teachers, leading good discussions was inseparable from the work of establishing a classroom culture in which students felt respected as people and as thinkers and were positioned as meaning-makers.

There is support in the literature for the importance of a strong sociocultural foundation to a dialogic classroom, though it is interesting to note that the majority of these studies focus on classrooms with marginalized student groups. I briefly summarize some of these studies in Chapter 2 in the section on leading respectful discussions, noting in particular that teachers' deficit perspectives of students' home lives and linguistic resources have been shown to have a deleterious effect on a classroom's dialogic culture (e.g., Fisher & Ros, 2008). Lee (2001) writes these words about the orientation of a secondary ELA teacher (Lee herself, an African-American woman) who instilled a rich intellectual classroom culture among a group of underachieving students in an all-Black school:

> She had to appreciate the humanity of these young people, their innate talents, and their infinite ability to learn, grow, and develop….There is no question in my mind that such a stance was one of the most powerful tools in the teacher's pedagogical toolkit. (p. 133)

Lee's work (as teacher and as researcher) draws on Ladson-Billings' (1994) and Foster's (1997) earlier findings on the importance of drawing productively on students' cultural resources. In essence, what she and they describe is the opposite of a deficit perspective; it is a deep belief in students' abilities to do sophisticated intellectual work. Not only that, it is a belief that students' home and community experiences have *prepared* them to do this work, if only the teacher could make explicit some of the ways in which students' cultural practices of thinking and speaking might give them traction on important disciplinary practices.

There is a danger in trying to generalize out from these studies to secondary students in general. Even the term "innate talents," stripped from the context of Lee's article, is at risk of being misunderstood. When Lee uses this term, I take her to mean, in large part, her students' culturally derived linguistic and intellectual resources. Thus, to support students in leveraging their innate talents for academic success, a teacher would need more than superficial knowledge of the students' home and community cultures, not to mention expertise in culturally responsive teaching strategies and/or practices that put that knowledge to good pedagogical use. And I would be remiss not to state that all of this takes place in a larger educational context in which the cultural resources of Black and Latinx students are routinely devalued by schools and teachers, often to violent effect. I don't use that word lightly; when a teacher devalues a student's cultural and

linguistic resources, consciously or subconsciously, that teacher does psychological and emotional violence to that student.

I take pains to note all of this because I want to use Lee's findings (and Ladson-Billings' and Foster's) to support some of the claims I am making about the importance of a strong sociocultural foundation to discussion-based teaching. At the same time, I want to be very careful not to "whiten" those findings, to remove them from their cultural context. With that said, there is reason to believe that the benefits of learning in an environment where one feels humanized extend to all students. Lee (2001) acknowledges as much and lays out a challenge to teacher educators:

> Loving and respecting young people is the mortar from which good teaching is built. As a field, we have not expended sufficient efforts to document systematically how to socialize beginning teachers into this view of the profession and of young people. (p. 133)

Although Lee connects love and respect to good teaching in general—and she is probably right to do so—I have made the case in this dissertation that it is especially critical to pedagogies like discussion that depend on students assuming intellectual responsibility and taking risks out loud. Although I cannot speak to the extent to which the participating teachers' respect for students did or did not extend equally to all student groups, I can report that they all sought to create environments in which students, generally speaking, felt valued as thinkers and as people.

If, as I've argued, treating students with respect and believing they are truly capable of sophisticated disciplinary investigation is foundational to leading good discussions, then it would seem that the work of preparing ELA teachers to lead

discussions cannot be separated from the work of shaping prospective teachers' orientations towards students, what Lee, in the above quote, refers to as the "socialization" of beginning teachers. Like Lee, I do not offer easy answers for how to socialize beginning teachers to love and respect their students, particularly teachers who bring deficit perspectives to bear on their students. Finding ways to demonstrate or represent students' manifest intelligence may represent one solution, particularly when that intelligence is presented in ways that make it easy for teachers to dismiss or overlook. How many smart things were said today in American classrooms that went completely unnoticed by teachers? Another kind of solution might be for teacher preparation programs to screen more carefully for candidates' latent deficit perspectives.

An additional challenge to this work of socialization can be better understood when paired directly with the work of training teachers to lead discussions. Given the high difficulty level of leading discussions, it seems plausible that beginning teachers will struggle mightily at first. This opens up the dangerous possibility that they will blame a failed discussion on students' deficiencies rather than their own undeveloped practice, thus reinforcing or producing a deficit perspective. Teacher preparation programs should be prepared to provide especially close support to their teacher candidates as they make their first attempts at leading discussions. In particular, it is crucial that they monitor how their teacher candidates make sense of their struggles with leading discussions. Are they identifying weaknesses in their practice, or are they assigning blame to students? Co-leading discussions with someone who is more practiced has the potential to mitigate some of this potential danger. Of course, this would depend on program faculty or mentor

teachers having expertise in leading discussions, a characteristic that is by no means a given.

One important manifestation of the participating teachers' respect for students was an emphasis on building relationships. This is an element of teaching that I fear is routinely oversimplified in teacher preparation programs, as if building relationships with students were just a matter of asking them what they did over the weekend. The teachers in this study draw on a range of practices to bridge the gap between teacher and students, including but not limited to playfulness, emotional openness, and caring about students' outside-of-school lives. Moreover, each of these practices might be done more or less skillfully. Take the practice of caring about students' outside-of-school lives. It is conceivable that some teachers might take a kind of voyeuristic pleasure in discovering the details of their students' lives. This pleasure is especially problematic when the teacher is very different culturally from the majority of his/her students, as is the case with Kathleen. I cannot get into Kathleen's head, but from what I observed, Kathleen's interest in her students never strayed into this territory, but remained at a respectful distance. She conveyed interest without being intrusive. Her students' lives were not exotic or sensational to her; rather, they represented an opportunity for connection and learning. I present this set of considerations to demonstrate just how complex the work of building relationships is, and to suggest the level of elaboration that might be required for teacher preparation programs to teach this practice responsibly.

I also want to note that an orientation that respects students as people and as thinkers may not be the only orientation that is consequential to leading good discussions. If the teachers in this study are any indication, disciplinary orientation also plays a role.

These are not teachers who believe there is one right interpretation to be wrung out of a work of literature, or that their job as English teachers is to lead students to that interpretation. Rather, they operate from a belief that works of literature hold a multiplicity of possible meanings, and that it is their job to initiate students into the disciplinary practice of interpretation, a practice that is nothing if not messy and time-consuming, especially for novices. This orientation surely predisposes teachers towards a practice like discussion, and, thus, may be a critical variable in both a) how often a teacher leads discussions, and b) the student-centeredness of that teacher's discussions. For example, a teacher that believes it is their job to lead students to the right interpretation may take a much more heavy-handed approach to leading discussions (if they choose to lead a discussion at all) than, say, someone like Daniel who wants to create "a space where [students] can play and attempt to come up with meaning themselves."

In addition to shaping a teacher's orientation towards students and their ability to create the kind of sociocultural environment that is supportive of discussions, teacher preparation programs must also attend to the more practical components of leading a discussion—that is, the teacher's ability to execute a wide array of discussion-related teaching practices, many of which they must execute in the heat of a discussion. Practitioners of practice-based teacher education have articulated a variety of useful strategies for teaching a "core practice" like leading discussions. Some of these strategies include decomposing the practice, rehearsals, and using video as both a pre- and post-enactment activity. McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh (2013) conceive of a four-part iterative learning cycle: 1) introducing teacher candidates to the core practice, 2)

preparing candidates to actually enact the practice, 3) requiring candidates to enact the practice with real students, and 4) supporting candidates in analyzing their enactment. Although I worry that this approach may encourage an overemphasis on isolated teaching moves, I also think there is much to be recommended in this approach.

To make this case, I want to consider for a moment, the potential benefits of the practice-based approach for the teachers in this study. As skilled as they were at eliciting and supporting dialogic discourse, I also observed numerous missed opportunities for drawing the students out further or getting students to respond to one another. What was frustrating about this pattern is that they had done all the work; they just needed to take one step further by, say, asking a student to be a little more transparent about his/her thinking (e.g., *Why do think that? What evidence from the text supports your position?*) or prompting other students to respond to what was just said (e.g., *What do you all think about that? Do you agree with Student X?*) All of the teachers were guilty of missing opportunities to extend or deepen the discussion, but Kathleen was the most frequent offender. How is it that a veteran teacher like Kathleen—with a stated commitment to discussion—could walk right up to the precipice of a rich, student-generated discussion and so consistently stop short? I think Kathleen is a perfect example of the kind of teacher who would stand to benefit enormously from practice-based approaches to teacher preparation—for example, from seeing a practice like leading discussions more thoroughly decomposed into its composite parts (e.g., asking clarification questions, providing sufficient wait time, etc.) or from analyzing video of her teaching alongside a more knowledgeable coach/mentor. My hunch, after spending a month in her classroom,

is that Kathleen would be dismayed to see the ways in which she sometimes thwarts discussion rather than encourages it.

There is something useful to be learned from seeing a teacher successfully build the kind of sociocultural foundation that I argue supports discussion, but fail to capitalize on that foundation. For one, it makes the case that, with respect to leading discussions, it is not enough for a teacher to have the right orientation towards students and learning without some proficiency in discussion-based practices that advance that orientation. I suspect the converse is also true. Basic competency in discussion-based practices without sufficient attention to orientation would threaten to reduce those practices to something coldly mechanical rather than alive with dialogic vitality. This how the *practice* of leading discussions gets reduced to checking boxes on a list of isolated teaching moves.

By emphasizing the mutually reinforcing nature of the relationship between the teachers' practices and orientations, I mean to ascribe to them equal levels of importance. I also mean to sidestep the debate over what comes first chronologically—orientation or practice. This debate is typically framed with the arrow of influence pointing in one direction—orientation precedes practice or practice precedes orientation, and, therefore, teacher education programs should emphasize one over the other. I contend that for the teachers in this study—who, significantly, are not novice teachers—orientation and practice exist in a state of reciprocal dependence. Their orientations simultaneously shape and are shaped by their practice. To prioritize one over the other would be to overlook the dynamic relationship between the two. Additionally, there is something inherently flawed in separating orientation and practice. It presumes that a teacher's orientation can be divorced from their enactment of practice, and, conversely, that practices themselves do

not have implicit orientations. I would contend that orientation and practice be attended to simultaneously—in fact, that there can be no other way—and it is a problem when we teach practice without explicitly discussing its orientation(s), or orientation without discussing its practical implications. Leading discussions is not just something that you do, but something that you are.

Relatedly, the findings of this study recommend against teaching novice teachers how to lead discussions absent of instructional context. As I note in Chapter 6, I was surprised by the amount of teacher talk I observed during the teachers' discussions. For the most part, and with the notable exception of Daniel's graded discussions, these teachers looked nothing like Ms. Z., who might go several minutes without so much as asking a clarification question, let alone making a contribution that might be perceived as monologic. These teachers were far more hands-on. They spoke often and directed students to important parts of the text, if not to specific interpretations. What I concluded, however, was not that they were contradicting their dialogic aspirations, but that they were adapting the activity of discussion in response to specific instructional variables, most significantly, their learning goal(s) for the discussion. The discussions I observed were not open-ended in the way that is often idealized in the literature, particularly when invoked as a rebuke to monologic teaching methods like lecture and recitation, but they were not intended to be. They had moments of open-ended discourse, but were more targeted in their purpose than a truly open-ended discussion is able to be. This suggests that a crucial part of leading discussions is being clear about what one's goals are for the discussion and determining (beforehand and in the moment) what support students need to reach those goals. It may even be that this kind of transparency would lead one to

determine on some occasions that a discussion is not, in fact, the best vehicle for a particular goal.

Another access point to these ideas is the interactive model of reading, as outlined by the RAND Reading Study Group (Snow, 2002). In this model, constructing meaning from a text is a function of three elements—the reader, the text, and the activity—in interaction with one another and situated in a sociocultural context. As a means of supporting reading comprehension, discussion falls into the "activity" category. The model serves as a reminder that discussions—as reading activities—do not occur independent of specific readers and specific texts. Moreover, activities have purposes, and those purposes should be tightly related to the readers in the room and the text they're reading. An activity like discussion, then, might look quite different depending on the dynamic interaction of reader, text, and purpose, requiring more or less intervention on the part of the teacher. We see, then, the limitations of a conceptualization of dialogism that eschews teacher talk entirely. When conceived of thusly as a binary, there is no space for all of the pedagogically warranted variations that, if the teachers in this study are any indication, exist in between the two poles.

What I am pushing for here is a more expansive conceptualization of dialogism that leaves room for some monologism, insomuch as that monologism is a defensible response to instructional variables like purpose and students. Indeed, I worry that a conceptualization of dialogism that identifies any and all teacher-generated content as less-than-ideal is not only unrealistic, but pedagogically misguided. As the teachers in this study demonstrate, sometimes monologic intervention is a matter of professional responsibility, pedagogical and otherwise. It may even be that the very concept of

dialogism as intended by Bakhtin and other social constructionists has been perverted by the myth of the "teacher-less" or completely student-generated discussion. Why should the teacher's voice not be included among the students'? Why should the teacher withhold his/her expertise, assuming he/she has some? To be sure, a big part of the work of leading discussions is supporting students in taking on more interpretive authority, and, as Daniel remarks, the teacher's interpretations risk usurping the students'. This is a sage observation of how power works in the classroom; however, I do not see that it precludes a teacher from talking, or even limiting their talking much at all if that talking is responsive to the discussion's instructional context. Moreover, a teacher's decision to withhold does not flip the power dynamic that Daniel alludes to. After all, the students can't choose to withhold, at least not without consequences.

This is not to say that it is not possible for a teacher to talk too much, or to talk when they should have asked a question or remained silent instead. If accounts in the literature are accurate, this describes a great deal of what happens in American classrooms. This may be why proponents of discussion often pitch it as an antidote to monologic teaching methods like lecture and I-R-E. It is a kind of over-correction for what is perceived as a problematic tendency among teachers—novice and veteran—to take up a lot of space with their talking. This over-correction makes sense. The "sexiness" of dialogism is, in large part, a function of its divergence from the old, tired way of doing things. And if the monologic instinct really is so deep-wired into teachers, they may need to see dialogism and monologism placed in stark relief. The problem with this is that it risks pigeonholing any and all teacher talking as anti-dialogic. My concern is that this framing of dialogism perpetuates a narrow and unrealistic conception of

dialogism. It is unrealistic in two senses: 1) it does not attend to how teacher talk might be necessary depending on important instructional variables, in particular, the teacher's goals for the discussion and their specific students, and 2) it is really, really hard to lead a completely student-generated discussion about a text. This last point is important because if a novice teacher tries to lead a discussion, expecting students to do all of the critical interpretive work, and to do so in an efficient and clear manner, they may be in for a rude awakening. And depending on how rude that awakening is, they may be less inclined to plan a discussion into their next lesson.

A final implication I wish to address is what these findings might say to contemporary efforts to create a performance-based assessment of a teacher's ability to lead a discussion. Performance-based assessment itself is not a new innovation. Student teaching and teacher observations, for example, are performance-based assessments. The innovation has been to develop standardized[39] performance-based assessments around a targeted practice like leading discussions. There are lots of good uses for such an assessment, but those uses all hinge on the precision of its evaluative function. If a performance-based assessment of leading discussions is going to support teachers in getting better at leading discussions or a teacher preparation program in holding itself accountable or redesigning its curriculum, we have to be reasonably certain of the validity of that assessment. This has grave consequences in a high-stakes assessment context; we would not want to deny or promote certification based on a flawed assessment. All of this boils down to a single question: Are we certain that the assessment is an adequate measurement of the practice?

[39] An assessment might be more or less standardized along a number of variables. For example, are examinees leading a discussion on the same text? Are they being evaluated with a common rubric? Are the students comparable in some significant way?

The findings of this study suggest that the full scope of what is included in the work of leading discussions is quite expansive. It is not just what the teacher does during discussions, but in large part, what they do before and after. It is the relationships they build, the sociocultural foundation they establish, the scaffolding of content and skills, and the way they integrate discussion into their curriculum. It is the work of fitting a particular discussion to specific instructional goals and students' specific instructional needs. All of this strikes me as quite difficult to assess, at least in a single assessment. Far simpler to evaluate a teacher's proficiency at some subset of more readily observable teaching moves, like asking clarification questions or directing students to respond to one another. Although I think there is value in assessing whether a teacher can perform these moves, I also think there is a danger in reducing the work of leading discussions to just these moves. Based on what I have learned from this study, I would be hesitant to stake my professional judgment of a teacher's readiness to lead discussions on whether or not they asked enough clarification questions or said things like, "John, do you agree with what Trisha just said?" No doubt these moves are important, but, ideally, they are a surface manifestation of a deeper set of commitments and values. A test-savvy teacher might learn to go through the motions of doing all of the moves that are being tested for, but lack the requisite orientation that really predicts a teacher's readiness (or willingness) to establish and sustain a strong dialogic culture. Even from a purely practical standpoint, there's a great deal more that goes into leading good discussions than just the facilitation part.

All of that said, it would be nearly impossible to evaluate a teacher's ability to do the work of leading discussions as I am defining it here in its fullness. One would need to

spend a month in a teacher's classroom, as I did for this study, observing everything the teacher does. This, obviously, is not practical; we have to bound the practice somewhere. Focusing our attention on the actual discussion is a concession to practicality, and it is probably the right concession to make. To assess a teacher's discussion-leading practices, the one thing I would absolutely *need* to see is a discussion. Moreover, depending on the design of the assessment, it is possible (though difficult to guarantee) that other elements of the teacher's performance—e.g., orientation towards students, scaffolding, the extent to which the discussion has been integrated into the curriculum—will be visible during the discussion. Be that as it may, no assessment of a complex practice like leading discussions is going to be perfect; it will always provide an incomplete—and, therefore, potentially less valid—picture. This doesn't mean there is no value in such efforts, just that an assessment's weaknesses ought to be fully acknowledged, especially if the assessment is going to be used as a central data point in important decision-making.

This brings me to the National Observational Teaching Exam (NOTE), a performance-based licensure exam currently in development through a partnership between Educational Testing Services (ETS) and TeachingWorks. I feel compelled to spend a moment considering the implications of this study for NOTE because it is the only licensure exam that I know of that specifically tests teacher candidates on their ability to lead discussions and because of its unusual design. Rather than setting the assessment in a real classroom, the NOTE discussion task is set in a simulated classroom environment with five digital student avatars controlled by an adult actor.[40] This is a concession to standardization. Since the assessment is going to be used to make

[40] There are other design aspects of the NOTE discussion task that warrant analysis; however, they have not been made publicly available yet.

certification decisions, it is absolutely crucial that candidates receive equal opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency, something that would be nearly impossible to ensure in a more authentic setting. The simulated environment gives the assessment designers very tight control over every aspect of the assessment. There is a still a human actor, which opens the door for some unwanted variability, but with regards to standardization, it is a marked improvement on a real classroom, or even a modified classroom.

As a rule, the more standardized an assessment, the less authentic it is. Reality is dynamic and unpredictable. Think about a real classroom with thirty-plus students and all of the potential variability therein. That kind of variability is anathema to a high-stakes assessment like NOTE, which is why NOTE opted to go with a simulated classroom. Of course, a drop-off in authenticity could lead to a drop-off in validity. At some point, a performance-based assessment no longer has enough resemblance to the real thing to provide any meaningful data. That is the question NOTE will have to answer to. Does leading a discussion in its simulated environment provide meaningful data about a candidate's ability to do so in a real classroom? Or, more specifically, does it provide *enough* meaningful data to improve on the status quo of knowledge-based assessment, and, therefore, to be a worthwhile investment?

Five students instead of thirty-plus students is a big difference. However, I don't think the teachers in this study would change their approach drastically if they were leading a discussion with only five students. The core of the work, I think, would still look basically the same. My biggest concern has to do with the fact that they are not real children, that the adult actor who controls the student avatars is reading from a script written by other adults. Everything the "students" do and say is an approximation of what

real students—of that age and with that text—would do and say. Moreover, the mandate of standardization has stripped those "students" of most meaningful sources of variability—cultural, developmental, behavioral, etc. Other than outward appearance and the sound of their voices (which attempt to convey some cultural difference), they are basically the same kid, more or less all equally prepared to meet the discussion's learning goals with the right prompting from the candidate. We must presume that all of the consequential sociocultural work and scaffolding has already been done, and all that is left for the candidate to do is ask the students why they think what they think. This oversimplifies the task somewhat, but it is not far off.

The danger in this assessment design is that it risks reducing a rich and complex practice like leading discussions to a set of mechanical teaching moves, to be applied on cue. This is not to say that the NOTE assessment will not still provide meaningful data. As I note throughout this dissertation, these teaching moves are important, and there is certainly an argument to be made for the usefulness of a checklist of teaching moves to be skillfully enacted during discussions. Additionally, this assessment might provide important information about a candidate's basic instructional stance. If the candidate does most of the talking during this assessment (when the assessment has been specifically designed so that he/she does not have to do most of the talking), it is probably a good indicator that the candidate does not have the requisite dialogic orientation. Yet, I still worry that the assessment provides a crude rendering of the work of leading discussions, and that it could influence teacher preparation programs to similarly narrow their view. Explicitly asking a student to explain their thinking and to connect that thinking to

learning goals or to other students' thinking is an important part of the work, no doubt, but if this study has taught me anything, it is that there is much, much more to it.

Speaking of there being much, much, more to it, I want to conclude this dissertation by returning to Ms. Z. Recall that my initial inspiration for doing this study was watching a video taken in Ms. Z.'s 6th grade classroom of a discussion about *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In this video, Ms. Z. stayed quiet for long periods of time. When she did speak, it seemed strangely passive. Nor did she communicate with her body language. She would look at whomever was speaking, but without betraying her reaction to what she was hearing. From an outsider's perspective, the students were basically having a discussion without her. It wasn't until she entered the discussion later on to make a couple of concise comments about what she'd heard so far and to ask a question that pushed the discussion in a slightly more nuanced direction that I realized what I initially perceived as passivity was actually restraint. The students were having a discussion without her because it was what she wanted them to do. I knew at the time that I was only getting the smallest of windows into Ms. Z.'s practice, and that her students in all likelihood did not arrive on her doorstep capable of having such a self-directed discussion. What I did not understand—and, therefore, what I set out to learn—is what a teacher must do to get to that point and what principles governed the very economical talking that Ms. Z. did do.

Now at the end of my study, I can make a good guess about what Ms. Z. did in the days and months preceding the discussion in question. I would be surprised if discussion were not an almost daily occurrence in her class.[41] The kind of thoughtful, focused, and

[41] In fact, I had a chance to sit down with Ms. Z. at one point and she referred to discussion as "the digestive system," a metaphor that nicely captures the central role of discussion to her pedagogy.

respectful discussion that students were having does not come out of nowhere. Which is why I feel confident in assuming that discussions in Ms. Z.'s class looked very different in September. By that I mean, surely Ms. Z. had to take a more hands-on approach before she could just sit back and let students go. She would have had to teach them how to talk to each other, to respectfully disagree, to ask questions (of a text and of each other). She would have had to push back against traditional classroom power structures, which, as 6th graders, her students would already have had ample time to internalize. She would have had to support students in building the confidence to risk sharing an idea out loud. She would have to make sure that students felt rewarded for taking that risk. And that is really just the tip of the iceberg. The problem with this video, if it is being used as an example of exemplary discussion practice, which it is, is that it omits all of that work. Evidence of the work is present in the students' behavior, but it has to be guessed at. As a representation of leading discussions, this video exists as a kind of rareified example of dialogism at its purest. To a new teacher, or to a teacher who struggles to lead good discussions, it might just seem like magic—to which the teachers in this study (and Ms. Z. herself) would say, it is hard, yes, but not magic. I hope that this dissertation can contribute to a representation of leading discussions that captures the practice in all of its complexity and all of its messiness, and, at the same time, pushes beyond more limited—and limiting—conceptualizations of dialogism. And in so doing, I hope that it can provide some small guidance to would-be leaders of discussions, present and future, who want to get their students talking about books and ideas, but who struggle, despite themselves, to move the needle towards a more dialogic pedagogy.

Appendix A: Preliminary Interview Protocol

1. How do you define "discussion"?

2. What role does discussion play in your pedagogy?

3. What do discussions look like in your classroom?
    a. How does this change over the course of a school year?

4. How do you know when you've led a good discussion?

5. How did you learn to lead discussions?

6. What do you think are the chief barriers to leading good discussions?

7. What supports need to be in place to increase the chances of leading a good discussion?

Appendix B: Sample Stimulated Recall Interview (Daniel's)

General questions about the graded discussions

1. What do you think are the main reasons to do the graded discussions?

2. Is there a cost to doing graded discussions?

3. How do you prepare students to successfully participate in a graded discussion? Do you do anything before the very first? After the first?

4. Have you had any this year that were notably better or notably worse? What do you think happened?

5. If you were going to tell another teacher how to do graded discussions, what would you emphasize?

6. I've noticed some students get frustrated when they have their hand up and they get passed over. This happens because other students don't see that they've had their hand up. Thoughts on this?

7. I've also noticed that for the most part students try to avoid just calling on their friends—how did you get them to do this?

8. Any thoughts on how some students make their required three comments and then check out?

Questions about a whole-class discussion on The Great Gatsby (Was Myrtle's death an accident or intentional?)

1. The question they write on is "Was Myrtle death's an accident or intentional. How do you know?" Can you talk about your thinking behind this question? What were your goals? Also: did you do any planning for this discussion? When you lead the discussion, you've got nothing in front of you, so if you have a plan, it seems to be in your head.

2. Ruby's lateness. WG doesn't address it at all. Maybe some questions here about his general attitude towards behavior management. (The student who slept through a class. Bernice's headphones on during discussion. The student who is always on his computer.)

3. Ana's comment: It was an accident and on purpose. An accident because Daisy only hit Myrtle because there was a car in the other lane. On purpose because she didn't want to be hit by the other car. What are you thinking during this comment?

4. Kima's comment: Tom intended for Myrtle to die. He orchestrated it by choosing what car to drive to NYC and on the way back. He knew Myrtle would run out. He "set it up." What are you thinking during this comment? That's two comments in a row that miss the mark. You don't directly respond to either of them, except to say that Kima is providing a third alternative.

5. A student asks the question, "Can we even trust Fitzgerald?" What are you thinking here? Why did you choose to respond as you did?

6. You push Ruby to elaborate on the metaphor that she is talking about. Does she give you what you were hoping to hear?

7. You change gears to talk about the color of the car. Was this your plan?

8. Drake's comment about new money/old money and the colors. This is a confusing comment. What is your interpretation of this comment?

9. You close the discussion by reminding them about allegory. Was this your intended conclusion, to talk about allegory and author's purpose? Did you achieve your goal for the discussion?

10. Less than half of the class spoke during this discussion. Thoughts on this?

11. How did you/would you use what came up during the discussion to shape future instruction?

Appendix C: Sample Student Focus Group Protocol (Daniel's)

1. How would you define "discussion"?
2. What are your favorite kinds of discussions?
3. How do you know when a discussion has been a "good" discussion?
4. What helps you to participate in discussions?
5. What makes it harder to participate in discussions?
6. How often do you have discussions in your classes at this school?
7. What would you say Daniel did to support you and your class in having good discussions?
8. Were there any obstacles to having good discussions in Daniel's class?
9. Did you like the graded discussions? Why/why not?

Appendix D: Discussion transcript from Daniel's class

Students write in their journals on the prompt: "Was Myrtle's death an accident or intentional?" After five minutes or so, Daniel assumes a position in front of the class and begins the discussion.

Daniel: Okay. So, Myrtle's death. Accident or intentional?

Student 1: I think it was intentional, because Daisy knew [???]. And also, at the time, she was probably feeling insecure because Tom had just discovered her affair and Gatsby was pushing her to leave Tom, so she maybe wanted to get rid of Myrtle so [???]

Daniel: Okay.

Student 2: I don't think it was intentional, because I don't think she actually knew that Myrtle was Tom's mistress. I think even if she did know, I don't think that she would've [???]

Student 3: So I feel like it was intentional, because, first of all, they were high on emotions. They were all high on drinks too [some laughter from other students], so they were all filled with this emotion, and, first of all, they'd be drinking, so--'cause Myrtle ran to the car because she assumed it was Tom, and since Myrtle used to call the house all the time or whatever, I'm assuming Daisy took the time to figure out who exactly this was that was calling Tom in the middle of the night or whatever. She probably knows what Myrtle looks like and everything. So when Myrtle runs out into the street because she thinks that Tom is driving the car and has come to save her from her husband, she runs out into the street and Daisy takes the opportunity to kill her.

Daniel: Ana.

Ana: In the book, it was described as, like--this is from Gatsby's point of view, so it could be, like biased, but he said there was another car going by, and so Daisy was going to swerve to avoid the woman, as he says, she "lost her nerve" and then turned back and hit the woman.

Daniel: So, wait, what side does that prove?

Ana: I feel like it proves more like it was kind of an accident and kind of on purpose too. I think she did it not because that was her husband's mistress but rather because she didn't want to be hit by the other car.

Daniel: Okay. Kima.

Kima: So, I think it was intentional, but not for the same reason anyone has said. I think Daisy and Gatsby didn't intend to kill her, but I think Tom did, because, I don't know, it's kind of weird to me that he wanted to drive Gatsby's car into town. Then he stopped by George Wilson's garage and, like, Myrtle probably saw them in the car, and then, on the way back, he told Gatsby and Daisy to drive in Gatsby's car. It's, like, really weird—why was he telling them which car to drive? And he knew they were drunk, and that Myrtle would probably come out to the car, so, I think he kind of set it up. And then, also, at the end of the book when they're talking about how George Wilson disappeared for a little while between the time that he was talking to the police and he killed Gatsby, and then you kind of discover that he was with Tom, although it's not, like, in stone. Tom probably was telling him that Gatsby killed her on purpose [???]

Daniel: So you're saying that there's actually a third option. And that is, that there was intention behind the death, but not Daisy's intention, but Tom's intention. Okay, Olivia.

Olivia: I was going to say that I like the point that Ana brought up 'cause, like, I don't think that in real life, like, when you're driving a car, your total reaction time, it takes 7 seconds, because you have to [students laugh]. Yeah, driver's ed. You have to, you see what's going to make you react, and then you have to think about how you're going to react, and then you actually have to react. So, she didn't have, like, really time to think about what she was going to do, and so she had to choose the best option, like Ana said. I think it isn't necessarily that she was trying to kill Myrtle on purpose. She was trying to save herself because she didn't want to be killed. I mean, hitting a person versus hitting a car head-on, like, that's more drastic to hit a car head-on. You can get whiplash, you can get so many other things. So, I kind of agree with what Ana said because, you know, it was just Daisy looking out for herself, and then, it also said, like, after the crash, Daisy was going to stop, but then Gatsby, like, took the wheel and he hit the gas pedal himself. So I feel like Daisy, she was actually, like, sad about the whole thing and she wasn't trying to do it on purpose, and they talked about how she was just lying in Gatsby's lap cause she was crying.

Daniel: How do we know… Who was driving the car?

Multiple students: Daisy.

Daniel: How do you know?

Multiple students: Gatsby said so.

Daniel: Gatsby said so. [*pause, makes a quizzical face*] Is that a problem?

Multiple students: Yeah.

Daniel: Why?

Student 4: Gatsby was the only other person in the car.

Daniel: Gatsby was the only other person in the car. Is it possible that Gatsby was driving?

[Some responses from students.]

Daniel: Totally. I mean, remember, what is he--he's there in his ultra creepy stalker-mode, like, after the accident, standing there, like, looking into the house, and Nick comes up next, right? And Gatsby says, she was driving, but what does he, what does Gatsby say?

Multiple students: Of course I'll take the blame.

Daniel: Of course I'll take the blame. Can we trust that Gatsby's telling the truth in that moment? Like, is it within the realm of possibility that it was Gatsby driving, Gatsby caused the accident, and now, he's trying to turn--

Student 5: Turn the tables.

Daniel: Turn it to his advantage, that he's like--

Kima: That he caused the accident on purpose, are you saying?

Daniel: No, that the accident was an accident. Gatsby had no beef with Myrtle at all, right. But the death was an accident, but he was afraid, because he's a criminal anyway, right? Drives off, but then says I'm going to take the blame, as a way of, like, one more sacrifice for Daisy. Or as a way to make this accident in to one more sacrifice for Daisy. What do you think? Possible? Not possible?

Student 3: If Daisy was the passenger, then Daisy would've known he wasn't driving. Then it wouldn't really be a sacrifice.

Daniel: Do we ever see Daisy talk about this at all? We only hear it from Gatsby. The entire conversation is filtered through Gatsby. Which means the entire conversation is suspect. Bernice.

Bernice: Explain why she didn't go to his funeral, 'cause, like, if he had done it, and she couldn't believe that he had just left, that would explain why she didn't go to his funeral, why they both didn't go.

Daniel: Do you think that Tom would have let her go to the funeral?

Multiple students: No.

Daniel: Okay, Ana.

Ana: I mean, if we're assuming that it was Gatsby who ran over Myrtle, I feel like Daisy would kinda tell Tom, like, everything. She's not really portrayed as a liar.

Daniel: It would be a way out for Daisy---

Ana: Yeah.

Daniel: --at that point, right? Instead of having to make this horrible decision between Tom and Gatsby, she could just tell the cops, oh yes, he killed her, totally, and he would go off to jail and that would be a way out for her.

Ana: Yeah it would.

Daniel: Interesting. We're talking about can we even trust Gatsby with this conversation. But there's another question. Can we even trust? Nick is the one telling us this story.

Student 6: Can we even trust Fitzgerald?

Daniel: Can we even trust Fitzgerald? I think we can always trust Fitzgerald. Because he's not lying about crafting this as fiction.

Student 6: He's just emphasizing his ability to kill off characters.

Daniel: That's true. That's true. Speaking of emphasizing his ability to kill off characters, I'm going to read the two pages where Myrtle gets it. [Students laugh.] Ready? Oh, this is page 136, if you're in this edition.

[Read's Myrtle's death scene.]

Daniel: It's a really graphic death. It's a very graphic death. He describes it brutally. Why? Lauren?

Lauren: It think it's because he's trying to tell the reader that, even though it's a fictional text, it's still, like, a hard thing.

Daniel: That it matters. That it's still important. And difficult. Yes, Carol.

Carol: It's also to emphasize, like, exactly what they did. It wasn't like, oh, they hit a body and now there's a body lying on the ground. It's a body torn open.

Daniel: So the details make it unambiguous as to how horrific it was. Our mind is not allowed to say, oh, it wasn't that bad. Good. Ruby.

Ruby: Okay, so I think that the way she died is sort of metaphorical because like, it explains that her chest is, like, ripped open, and then, the quote, "there's no need to listen for the heart beneath it." It was because she did this act out of love. And I thought that was kind of metaphorical. She was all exposed while Tom was kind of [???] the entire time and, like, didn't actually care, but she thought he did even though it was just an abusive relationship. So I think it was, like, a very metaphorical, kind of--it's going to sound kind of messed up, but I like that scene. But I think it's kind of, like, a good conclusion to her story.

Daniel: So you're saying that, literally, literally, she's hit by a car and her body is kind of mangled as she dies. But then, tell me specifically, what is the metaphor that you're talking about?

Ruby: So, like, her heart was exposed in the end. And that was kind of probably what she wanted to do, but, like, never was able to be honest with what she actually cared about, because she was in such a twisted situation. Good, Lauren.

Lauren: Another thing about it is, I think it was trying to make it seem like, like people, when they talk about a death or something, they make it seem like heroic or romantic or something. Like, oh yeah, they just died and they were such a great person and such. But, like, the way he described it, he showed, like, just how horrifying death can be. It's not just, like, your life kind of leaves you and you're just a shell now. But it's ripped from you.

Daniel: Ruby.

Ruby: Oh, the other thing is, I feel like, I know that, personally, whenever I watch in like a movie, or read about a really gruesome death, it kind of does this psychological thing, like, that's not supposed--like, you're not supposed to be ripped open. So you're mind is kind of numbed at first, like, you're not used to seeing, like, just bodies that are like, "Hey guys, like, look at entrails." And so it's kind of, like, horrific when you read about it because you're like, that's not normal, that's not a normal death. You're supposed to die old and in your sleep. That's the typical death.

Daniel: So the detail emphasizes the--

Ruby: Abnormality.

Daniel: The abnormality of the death. Nice. Okay, hey guys, what's color's the car?

Multiple students: Yellow.

Daniel: Yellow. What color does Michaelis think it is?

Multiple students: Green.

Daniel: Where have we seen that color before?

Kima: The green light.

Daniel: What?

Serena: The green light.

Daniel: Why? Why make a connec--It's a yellow car. We've established way before Michaelis talks that it's a yellow car. We talk about it being a yellow car after. Why is it like--Michelle.

Michelle: I don't know. Maybe it's to make a connection that Daisy was indeed driving it?

Daniel: How? How does that make that connection?

Michelle: Well, because at the beginning of the book, when Gatsby was reaching for the green light, we can establish that the green light was a metaphor for Daisy, and we can just kind of make the assumption that Daisy was driving 'cause [???]

Daniel: Nice. Ruby.

Ruby: The other think is, I feel like it's another metaphor because that car's just out of reach just like the green light, because they're never going to be able to know exactly what happened, because the truth of how she died is, like, beyond what they're capable of knowing.

Daniel: Lauren and then Kima.

Lauren: Um. I agree that it's a metaphor, but, like, the way that I thought about it-- it's kinda odd. Um, I was thinking about it and the way, like, how Gatsby is, like, new money and then Tom is old money, and the fact that Gatsby was driving the car. That was the metaphor, like, light green could be, like, it's a newer color, it seems like a cleaner color while when you think of the word "old," you think of muted colors, like an olive green or something. So, like, like that could signify that he acknowledged someone other than Tom was driving the car.

Daniel: Good. Kima, then Bernice, and then we gotta move on.

Kima: Um, I feel like there's something more there with the green light itself. I kinda, when I was reading it, I got the idea of, like, the American Dream in a way. I feel like Daisy is kind of Gatsby's Dream. Like, she represents the American Dream for Gatsby, and that light was representing her. And so, when--and then I was also associating, like, cars with the American Dream, cause Gatsby has a really nice car and he's wealthy and that's part of the American Dream is obtaining money. And in the Valley of Ashes, like,

George Wilson was cleaning cars, because they don't have that money. And so, when he says the car is light green, and then also the car breaks from Myrtle hitting it, I feel like it's kind Gatsby's dream breaking, his chance with Daisy, because that's what kind of ended…

Daniel: So you're saying that Myrtle's death, in addition to Myrtle, Myrtle's death killed Gatsby's dreams.

Kima: Yeah.

Daniel: Okay. Bernice.

Bernice: I don't know. I thought when I heard green, I thought of green with envy sort of theme, and, like, the way Myrtle died, and how, like, with the whole Daisy might've killed her, she might've envied her in a way because her husband was, um, with another woman even though she's given him a child and everything, but he still found affection with someone else, and, like, that envy, the green car, ended up killing her.

[A P.A. announcement about flu vaccinations. Daniel performs his annoyance.]

Daniel: Alright. Bernice, finish.

Bernice: [pause] I'm done.

Daniel: Um, this all great work. What you're hearing today is great analysis. I just want to remind you guys of one thing. What do we call it—think back to last year—what do we call it, like, in this instance the death of Myrtle, when something happens that is both literal and metaphorical at the same time. Michelle.

Michelle: Allegory.

Daniel: Allegory! Guys, when you can identify allegories like that, you are right next to author's purpose, alright? When you can find an allegory like that and describe it, as Ruby did very well, you're right there at author's purpose. And considering things like that the death of Myrtle is not just literally horrifying but metaphorically important, alright? These are ideas that you need to be constantly thinking about when you're reading literature. I would, in fact, start thinking about the allegory of the green light.

[Transitions to next activity.]

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